

Lyn Hejinian's and Charles Bernstein's Language Poetics:

A Postmodern Conceptual Grammar

By
Nagy Mohamed Fahim Eweis Rashwan
For
Ph.D. English Language and Literature

Research Supervisors:

Professor: Nicholas Zurbrugg

Professor: Nigel Wood

Word Count: 84000 approximately.

Contents

Acknowledgement	
Abbreviations	
Abstract	1
Preface	2

Part One: Critical Context and Conceptual Grammar

Chapter 1: Unresolved Questions:

The Context of Hejinian's and Bernstein's Poetics 13

1. Classification and Definition 19
2. Origins and Influences 23
3. Language Poetry and the Genre of Poetry 37
4. Identity Politics and the Question of Identifiability 43

Chapter 2: Self, Reference and Form:

Language Poetry's Criticism and the Notion of *Implicit Coherence* 48

1. The Poetics of Reference in Language Poetry 49
2. Self-expression and the Function of Form 60
3. Concrete Poetry and the Deliberateness of Form 63
4. Cage and the Randomness of Form 70
5. Language Poetry and the Differentiality of Form 73
6. The Notion of *Implicit Coherence* 80

Chapter 3: Paralogy, the Sublime, Contradiction and Irony (*deep parody*)

Lyotard and Hutcheon 83

1. Language-Games and the Legitimation Problematic 86
2. The Aesthetic of the Sublime 95
3. The Postmodern Sublime 98
4. Contradiction: 100
 - a. The 'Ex-Centric', and the Anti-Whole 102
 - b. The 'Emunciating Subject' 106
5. 'Parodic Irony', or *Deep Parody* 108

Part Two: Charles Bernstein & The Poetry of Mistakes 115

Chapter 4: Mistakes of Visibility:

Paralogy and Contradiction in Bernstein's Poetic Self 120

Chapter 5: Mistakes of Readability:

Bernstein's Development and Language 135

1. Signification Rationale and *Deep Parody* 139
2. Style of Textual Fragmentation and *Implicit Coherence* 155

Chapter 6: Mistakes of Sensibility:

Bernstein and the Postmodern Sublime 165

Part Three: Lyn Hejinian & The Poetry of Challenge 176

Chapter 7: Beyond Autobiography: Hejinian's Signification Rationale 181

1. Challenging Meaning:
Implicit Coherence, Contradiction and Paralogy 187

2. Challenging Containment:
The Roles of Sequence, Grammar and Vocabulary 194

Chapter 8: Hejinian's Self and Textuality 202

1. Challenging Formability:
Deep Parody in Hejinian's Poetic Self 203
2. Challenging Textuality:
The Role of Hejinian's Fragmentation Style 213

Chapter 9: Hejinian's Sublime Poetics 221

**Chapter 10: The Conclusion:
Hejinian and Bernstein: A Grammar of Differentiability 229**

Bibliography

Appendix I: Biographical Notes

Appendix II: Main Publications about the Language Poets

Acknowledgement:

I would like to thank the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, particularly the English Department, for providing the studentship bursary that allowed my full-time commitment to this work. I am also very grateful to the Language poets; Charles Bernstein, Bob Perelman, Lyn Hejinian, Steve McCaffery and Karen MacCormack for their various correspondence, discussions and interviews. I am particularly indebted to my research supervisor professor Nigel Wood for his invaluable support, particularly at the later stages of this thesis when my first supervisor, Professor Nicholas Zurbrugg, had passed away. Very special thanks are due to my wife, Arlene, for her endurance, patience and care throughout this study. To her, I remain greatly indebted.

Especially, my heart-felt gratitude goes posthumously to Professor Nicholas Zurbrugg, who had spared neither his time, nor his effort, up to the very last moments of his short life, to offer this work the guidance and support it needed. He had not only been my research supervisor, but also my friend and mentor with whom I have spent some of my most enriching time. While his passing in this sudden manner has shocked and saddened me to the core, his wisdom and commitment will not be forgotten. I only hope that I may one day be as worthy of them as he thought, in order to continue the work he started.

This thesis is dedicated to his memory.

Abbreviations of the Main Theoretical Works Cited

By Jean-François Lyotard

- PMC The Postmodern Condition (1984)
- LAS Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime (1991)

By Linda Hutcheon

- POP A Poetics of Postmodernism (1988)
- PPM The Politics of Postmodernism (1989)

By Charles Bernstein

- CD Content's Dream (1986)
- AP A Poetics (1992)

By Lyn Hejinian

- LOI The Language Of Inquiry (2000)

By Ron Silliman

- NS The New Sentence (1977)

By Bob Perelman

- MOP The Marginalization of Poetry (1996)

Abstract:

In the general atmosphere of postmodern increasing cultural conservatism, the experimental and highly innovative work of Language poets Charles Bernstein and Lyn Hejinian offers a relief in terms of both their cultural rejections of objectivist realisms and their aesthetic interrogation of subjectivist meanings. However, most of their critical considerations since their beginnings in the late 1970s have tended to assimilate the complexity of their aesthetics under familiar, if reactive, poetic or political criteria. Thus defining their work as either nonsensical; schizophrenic, or as anarchic; revolutionary, or worse still, somewhere in between, as failed ideology, elitist poetry or contaminated poetics.

This thesis intends to negotiate this situation. Firstly, it will suggest that these poets' ideals and practices harbour an identical cry for a conceptual grammar capable of elaborating their positive postmodern dynamics both individually and generally. Secondly, it will propose such grammar in terms of Jean-François Lyotard's, Linda Hutcheon's and its own concepts of postmodern 'paralogy' and the 'sublime', 'contradiction' and 'irony', *implicit coherence* and *deep parody*, respectively. Lastly, it will offer its new readings of the positive dynamics of these poets' postmodern aesthetics in two comparative case studies.

As such, this thesis will argue that the formal experiments of these poets are not simply attempts to purge poetic language from the politically all but neutralizing aspects of referentiality and self-expression, as most of their critics suggest. Rather, they are attempts to understand and redefine the problematic natures and functions of these aspects with regard to what they generally see as language's poetic responsibilities in society at large. According to the proposed grammar of this thesis, the work of these poets offers highly sophisticated and individual forms of self-expression and referentiality while critiquing their usual (conventional and more experimental) meanings and roles. Similarly, their work produces particular postmodern forms of political and cultural consciousness, offering the kind of specific redefinitions of the cultural roles of the reader and the writer that resist labelization as a simple ideology or as an anarchic poetics. For Hejinian, such characteristics materialize as a process of continuous challenge to completeness of meaning, finality of form, syntactic certainty and deliberateness of identity. For Bernstein, it materializes as a cluster of self-reflexive mistakes against stability of meaning, transparency of form, linearity of thought and homogeneity of identity. For both poets, these traits identify a rich cultural and aesthetic investigation into the reciprocal existential impactions amongst language, consciousness and reality, and a significant step toward a truly critical postmodern poetics.

Preface

Perhaps we should begin by outlining the main parameters of this thesis more specifically. Our primary object of discussion is, of course, the work of the contemporary American poets Charles Bernstein and Lyn Hejinian: two leading figures in the theory and practice of the Language movement, also known as Language writing, Language-orientated poetry, Language-centred poetry¹, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, Language school, Language group or simply as Language poetry.² This thesis will consider their aesthetics primarily in terms of three sets of dual inter-related concepts. The first derives from Jean-François Lyotard's concepts of the 'sublime' and 'paralogy' in his books The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (1984) and Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime (1991). The second derives from Linda Hutcheon's concepts of postmodern 'irony' and 'contradiction' in her books A Poetics of Postmodernism (1988) and The Politics of Postmodernism (1989). And the third elaborates my own concepts of *implicit coherence* and *deep parody*.

Many of the critics who have discussed the work of these poets such as Rod Mengham, Albert Gelpi, Eliot Weinberger, Tom Clark, Charles Altieri, David Bromwich, Fredric Jameson and George Hartley define it as 'evasive' and 'anarchic',³ 'shapeless' and 'without perspective',⁴ a 'succession of depthless images and empty sounds'⁵ and generally dismiss Language writing as a 'self cancelling project of making empty rhetorical claims',⁶ a symptom of postmodern 'schizophrenia',⁷ a poetry with 'no future',⁸ obliterating 'any possibility whatsoever to be read'.⁹

¹ Ron Silliman, 'Realism: An Anthology of Language Writing', Ironwood 20, Vol. 10, no. 2 (Fall, 1982), p. 62.

² For a thorough discussion of Language poetry beginnings see Bob Perelman, The Marginalization of Poetry: Language Writing and Literary History (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp.16, 40, henceforth cited as MOP. Also see Hank Lazer, Opposing Poetries: Volumes One & Two (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1996).

³ Rod Mengham, untitled review in Textual Practice, Vol. 3, no. 1 (Spring, 1989), p. 155.

⁴ Albert Gelpi, 'The Genealogy of Postmodernism: Contemporary American Poetry', The Southern Review, Vol.26, no. 3 (Summer, 1990), p. 532.

⁵ Eliot Weinberger, 'A Note On Montemora, America & The World', Sulfur, no. 20 (Fall, 1987), p. 195, also in Weinberger's book Written Reaction: Poetics, Politics, Polemics (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1996), p. 78.

⁶ Charles Altieri, 'Without Consequence Is No Politics: A Response to Jerome McGann' in Politics & Poetic Value, Robert Von Hallberg (ed.), (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 301, also in Critical Inquiry, Vol.13, no. 3 (Spring, 1987).

⁷ Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (New York and London: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 28.

Building upon the more subtle approaches of critics such as Marjorie Perloff, Jerome McGann, Stephen Fredman, Michael Greer, Jeffery T. Nealon and Michael Davidson, this thesis will suggest that discussion of these poets' aesthetics in terms of a combination between Hutcheon's, Lyotard's and my own concepts of postmodern 'contradiction', 'irony', 'paralogy', the 'sublime', *implicit coherence* and *deep parody* helps to redefine the positive postmodern stature of their work. In particular, we will suggest how these poets' rejection of conventional concepts of poetic self-expression and identity, of political opposition and neutrality, of linguistic referentiality and the function of the generic, has culminated in work with ten main characteristics:

1. It is highly individualistic and as such totally identifiable, though not conventionally self-expressive and only implicitly projective of the poet's self.
2. It is based on linguistic reference, though not simplistically referential.
3. It is strongly political, though not simplistically oppositional.
4. It emphasizes readers' collaboration and criticizes conventional concepts of authenticity and authorship, though often negotiates its democratic principles in practice by exercising a high degree of control over the syntactic designs of its texts.
5. It is aesthetically and structurally exploratory, though fails to question the limitations of its own written-word media and page-based contours.
6. It is both readerly and performerly, though its theories are more visibly interactive than its poetry.
7. It challenges conventional measures of meaning such as grammar, discursiveness and narrativity, as well as conventional aesthetic standards such as harmony and order, though often evinces its own versions of multi-contextual harmony and order as well as its own procedural patterns and textual re-narrativization possibilities.
8. It attempts to underline the sociality of language as the medium, rather than the instrument, of consciousness, though its poetic writings may initially appear elitist in register.
9. It is generically investigative, though not entirely opposed to the existence of genres.
10. And more generally, it is motivated by a basic suspicion toward a sovereign or stable reality and offers the differential as its proposed substitute.

⁸ Linda Reinfeld, Language Poetry. Writing as Rescue (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), p. 148.

⁹ George Hartley, Textual Politics and the Language Poets (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 14.

I will therefore argue that the work of these poets, particularly Bernstein's Sense of Responsibility (1979), Islets / Irritations (1983), Rough Trades (1991), Dark City (1994) and My Way (1999), and Hejinian's Writing Is an Aid to Memory (1978), My Life (1980 & 1987), Oxota (1991), The Cold of Poetry (1994) and Happily (2000) emerge within the kind of 'conflict between the faculties of a subject; the faculty to conceive of something and the faculty to present something'¹⁰ with which Lyotard's The Postmodern Condition (1984) associates the 'unpresentable' (PMC:78) evocations of the 'sublime' and the 'absolute'.¹¹

I will further propose that these poets' aesthetic and cultural ideals and practices are best identified within the more general context of postmodern culture's legitimation problematic. That is, within the context of the contemporary absence of a single permanent body of rules, such as religion, the discourse of emancipation or the ideology of liberal humanism, that can univocally justify all judgements of value (scientific, aesthetic and philosophic). Lyotard calls this the absence of a 'universal meta-language' (PMC:41).

It is in this particular context, that the complexity of these poets' formal and contextual experiments and theories proves most interesting, inasmuch as their work attempts to change the language-game of poetics as ordinarily known. This change, as we shall see, takes effect in their works' dynamics of poetic play by offering both arbitrary and deliberate formal qualities simultaneously, rather than either individually, and by emphasizing *implicit*, rather than explicit, *coherence*. It is also offered in the cultural and aesthetic values they put forward; the differential instead of the simply different, the multiple instead of binary and the 'other' and the sublime instead of the beautiful. Finally, it is offered in these poets' implied understandings of the role and scope of the materials involved; language as the substance rather than the instrument of awareness, and reality as a perception-dependent quality rather than a sovereign given. As such, Lyotard's definition of 'paralogy' partially offers the best explanation for these poets' challenging aesthetic and cultural research. For Lyotard, insofar as paralogy resists and replaces the modernist principles of consensus and rational materiality – what he calls 'the narrative functions' (PMC:Intro.,24) – with the differential and the multiple, it offers itself as the primary postmodern principle of legitimation.

¹⁰ Jean-François Lyotard, 'Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?' (1982), Régis Durand (trans.), in The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Trans.), (Minnesota and Manchester, U.K.: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 77, henceforth cited as PMC.

¹¹ Jean-François Lyotard, Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime, Elizabeth Rottenberg (trans.), (California: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 124, henceforth cited as LAS.

I will argue, therefore, that, on the one hand, Lyotard's concepts of the 'sublime' and 'paralogy' help to redefine the ways in which these poets' positive aesthetics investigate the boundaries of language and meaning, of poetry and theory, of art and society, while searching for more poetic possibilities in order to explore the newer areas of aesthetic production and consumption that Bernstein and Hejinian respectively associate with 'the sounding of Language from Inside',¹² and with 'the open text'.¹³

On the other hand, I will argue that the public ideals and aesthetic practices of Bernstein and Hejinian emerge within the kind of 'irony' and 'contradiction' that Hutcheon associates with the postmodern modes of creativity. In Hutcheon's terms, postmodernism is a 'contradictory enterprise' whose 'art-forms and theory' simultaneously 'install and then destabilize conventions in parodic ways' foregrounding both their 'critical or ironic rereading of the art of the past' as well as their 'own inherent paradoxes and provisionality'.¹⁴

However, as will become apparent, both Bernstein and Hejinian do not utilize explicit quotations in their ironic signalling of the past as Hutcheon's concept of 'irony' maintains. Rather, they variably incorporate the kind of language that characterizes the mental attitudes and reading expectations of the art and social life of that past. This kind of 'ironic parody' (POP:27), we shall term *deep parody* in order to distinguish it from the more obvious form of parody Hutcheon identifies. By *deep parody*, I therefore mean; a subtle contextual parodization of certain general artistic and social conventions encoded in language such as common proverbs, aphorisms, expressions and metaphors, as opposed to a parody of a particular author. In this sense, while Hutcheon defines her concept of postmodern 'irony' in terms of authorial forms of overt parody, this thesis re-defines Hutcheon's concept of postmodern 'parody' in terms of the more general, and hidden, forms of *deep parody*.

Similarly, the poetics of these poets resist conventional standards of meaningfulness such as narrativity and discursiveness for their claim to reality and permanence and for their authority over the signification potentials of the text. Instead, they attempt to offer a form of coherence that is primarily disharmonious or incommensurable attempting to account for the reader as an integral part of the writing process itself. This kind

¹² Charles Bernstein, 'Language Sampler', The Paris Review, no. 86 (Winter, 1982), p. 75.

¹³ Lyn Hejinian, 'The Rejection of Closure', Manuscript to the author (May, 1999), p. 43.

¹⁴ Linda Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), p. 23, henceforth cited as POP.

of coherence we shall call *implicit coherence* in order to distinguish it from the various shades of harmonious or explicit coherence offered in the work of many conventional and more experimental poets such as Robert Lowell, John Ashbery, William Burroughs, Eugen Gomringer, Robert Lax and John Cage. Although guided by the work, the ultimate definition of this *implicit coherence* lies not only indirectly in the poem, but also, to a significant degree, within readership, allowing more varied possibilities for meaning reformulation.

As such, I will suggest that far from being 'schizophrenic', 'shapeless' or 'anarchic', the work of Bernstein and Hejinian interrogate traditional concepts of writerly competence and linear readership by employing trans-generic poetic techniques or what one might define as a re-examination of the social and cultural functions of language as well as the object of its aesthetic relevance to the individual. Presenting two comparative case studies re-examining Hejinian's and Bernstein's respective aesthetic and cultural ideals and practices, this thesis will consider the distinctly *individual* ways in which each of these two poets elaborates predominantly *shared* poetic and political concerns while resisting what they respectively term 'absorptive writing'¹⁵ (or the constructivist approach to meaning) and 'directive writing'¹⁶ (or the use of language as an instrument for pre-determined meanings, rather than a generator of those meanings) in order to refine strategies permitting what Jerome McGann defines as Language poetry's 'antithetical venture'.¹⁷

In other words, this thesis will consider the individual techniques and rationales particular to each of these poets' aesthetics while elaborating their common ideals and practices as well as the key areas of overlap between their work and Language poetry at large. For example, resistance to conventional self-expression and the narrow uses of linguistic reference in contemporary language has been a common leitmotif for the poetics of most Language poets including Bernstein's and Hejinian's. The particularity of this general resistance can be elaborated more accurately by use of the conceptual grammar of this thesis particularly Lyotard's concept of 'paralogy', Hutcheon's of 'contradiction' and ours of *implicit coherence*. At the same time, both Hejinian and

¹⁵ Charles Bernstein, 'The Artifice of Absorption' in *A Poetics* (Cambridge, MA, & London: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 64, henceforth cited as *AP*.

¹⁶ Lyn Hejinian, 'The Rejection of Closure' in *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2000), p. 43, henceforth cited as *LQI*.

¹⁷ Jerome McGann, 'Contemporary Poetry, Alternate Route', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 13, no. 3 (Spring, 1987), pp. 626-29.

Bernstein offer their own particular points of emphasis and signature-methods of writing within this general area, but also beyond it, and in accordance with all components of our proposed conceptual grammar.

In this sense, this thesis addresses three main questions.

1. To what extent can the particular cultural and textual concepts and rationales of Language poetry in the work of Bernstein and Hejinian, and the particular cultural and textual concepts and rationales of the work of Bernstein and Hejinian, be redefined more clearly and accurately in terms of this thesis's conceptual grammar?
2. What are the specific autobiographical and developmental elements in Hejinian's and Bernstein's work?
3. What is the particular poetic and cultural significance of Bernstein's and Hejinian's work?

Chapter 1 will discuss the general controversy surrounding these poets' aesthetic and cultural significance, particularly the ways in which their work is often perceived as being difficult largely in terms of its textual strategies while being celebrated in terms of its oppositional or antithetical qualities. Reassessment of the limitations of these approaches will enable us to define the various ways in which their work deserves more specific consideration than usually given, particularly in terms of its distinctive and generically investigative character. Offering selective comparisons between their work and the work of an earlier generation of experimental poets such as Burroughs and Ashbery, this chapter aims to challenge the typical critical definitions of their contemporary relevance in terms of the merely 'experimental', by showing the kind of multi-dimensional complexity their poetics offers.

Chapter 2 will attempt to partially illustrate this complexity by generally introducing our concept of *implicit coherence* as a more accurate means with which to define these poets' specific kinds of contemporaneity and distinctiveness and, more specifically, to reevaluate some of the most radical definitions of their ideals and practices since their beginnings in the early 1970s. I will primarily focus upon the Language poets' concepts of the natures and roles of linguistic referentiality, self-expression and authorial identity, as well as on their concepts of the function of poetic form. By comparing selected samples of various conventional and avant-garde poetics (such as Robert Lowell's, Eugen Gomringer's, Robert Lax's and John Cage's) with similar samples from Language poetry (such as Silliman's and Perelman's), this chapter intends to re-define some of the key cultural and aesthetic characteristics of the Language poetics. Also shared by the poetics of Bernstein and

Hejinian, these characteristics will form the background of our later re-readings of these poets' specific signatures and significances.

Chapter 3 will complete our proposed conceptual grammar by discussing Lyotard's concepts of 'paralogy' and the 'sublime', and Hutcheon's concepts of 'contradiction' and 'irony'. It will demonstrate the ways in which these concepts can be re-defined to illustrate and consolidate the multi-dimensionality of Bernstein's and Hejinian's poetics as well as the general positive impact of their aesthetics on contemporary culture.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 discuss Bernstein's particular poetic philosophy and his views of his own work. Providing case studies of the key phases of Bernstein's work, the three chapters will analyse and define his aesthetic and the ways in which Lyotard's, Hutcheon's and our own respective concepts foreground both its aesthetic and cultural significance. These chapters will argue that Bernstein's specific intellectual signature takes the character of a 'mistake' in discursive reason harbouring a paralogical disbelief in, and a parodic insistence upon, language's capacity to represent its own processes of signification. This, in turn, facilitates a multi-faceted contradictory poetic style, which typically blends the ordinary with the experimental, effecting *implicit coherence* and a playful kind of the sublime. The development of Bernstein's poetics, as we shall discover in chapter 5, from an early (1970s and 1980s), primarily readerly, to a recent (1990s to present), primarily performatively textuality, re-emphasizes these poetic and intellectual traits, while reconstituting some of his work's formal priorities.

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 discuss Hejinian's work, her aesthetic principles, concepts and writing strategies as well as the ways in which she defines her own cultural leitmotifs. They will discuss the ways in which her seemingly autobiographical mode of writing paradoxically elaborates a distinctly more diffused sense of self than often claimed by her critics. They will also compare Hejinian's and Bernstein's aesthetics, further elaborating the distinctiveness and continuity of their respective poetics in order to suggest how they can be more accurately described in terms of our conceptual grammar. We will argue that Hejinian's general intellectual signature takes the character of a challenge, rather than of a mistake, harbouring a paralogic belief in language's capacity to represent its own processes of signification mixed with a parodic form of awareness of the impossibility of perfect representation. This, in turn, facilitates a fusive poetic style that seamlessly integrates the ordinary and the experimental, producing multiple levels of *implicit coherence* and a contemplative kind of the sublime.

Our discussions of Hejinian's and Bernstein's poetics will highlight the extent to which their respective writing philosophies, intellectual leitmotifs and readership effects invest themselves almost entirely in investigating the epistemological problems of language's relationship to thought and the ways in which poetic form can be empowered to aesthetically enact this relationship's various complexities. In other words, these poets research the aesthetic processes of meaning itself in order to formulate a philosophy of form; a poetic language, which would be suitable, or just, to these processes' perceived complexities. As such, their tactics are motivated by a clear sense of philosophic and political responsibility and not simply schizophrenic or 'mad'.

The conclusion, chapter 10, summarizes and consolidates the main arguments of this thesis. It also suggests that in the very nature of such postmodern attempts to formulate a newish poetic language as that of Bernstein's and Hejinian's poetics, lies an identical cry for a similarly newish conceptual grammar capable of responding to it. Following the growing demands of realism for only tangible or easily digestible clarities is clearly inadequate and often misleading. The resultant approaches of such demands, as we shall see, either dismiss this sort of language as utter 'nonsense' or mythologize it as a complete 'revolution', but will be worse still and mediate, selectively as it were, a position between the two. A conceptual grammar, such as this thesis attempts to offer, if successful, should, instead, lead to a more accurate understanding of such language on its own proposed grounds, both negatively and positively, and not simply on some familiar grounds. As critic Jeffery T. Nealon suggests, this is 'a writing that does not move toward the wholesomeness of a meaning, but strives to find a measure for itself, a way to account for the surface play of the poem itself, rather than solely to refer to or to clarify some end or meaning'.¹⁸

The effect of reading these poets testifies to this simple fact. More than ever in American poetry before, their work leaves the reader with a definite sense of adventure, not outside her own world and language and into the superior mind of the author, or the text, but rather inside her very language and world. Re-orchestrated and re-defined, the reader's own world and language, though themselves have not essentially changed in any constructivist way, become, nonetheless, much newer, more complex and ultimately different.

¹⁸ Jeffery T. Nealon, Double Reading: Postmodernism After Deconstruction (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 142.

It is this type of paradoxical difference or, as we shall call it, **differentiality**, that urges us to re-think these poets' poetic and political contributions in terms of 'paralogy' rather than 'invention'. For, in order to be deemed as 'invention', following Lyotard's re-definition of the term, such contributions must first comply with the established rules (or the normative definitions of meaningfulness, relevance and adequacy) of the legitimating criteria (efficiency, progression, or operativity) that govern the value assignment processes of the existing 'language game'¹⁹ of poetics in the culture. When considered in the terms of this thesis, it will become clear that these poets have already changed those rules in their own practice. Their works' significance cannot, therefore, be accurately ascertained according to the rules they have already rejected and changed; not without considerable reduction. Significantly, this, as we shall also see, has characterized most of the ways in which their work has been critically defined.

It is important, in this sense, not to take for a starting point a consideration of their work as necessarily significant in an ordinary way. For, in effect, we shall find that logically they have, more or less, done both: added, and not added, to the existing political and poetic volume as we normally view it; managed, and not managed, to push poetry and language beyond their 'established' limits, at the same time. And they have done so, not aggregationally (some aspects of their work have, others have not) as the best of their critical considerations maintain, but simultaneously; fusively (the same aspects have and have not concomitantly), as we shall demonstrate. These poets, in other words, have questioned the viability conditions upon which such 'established' conceptual limits could comfortably rest, without attempting a clear-cut substitution, but with emphasis on self-reflexive openness and with many relative failures and successes. **It is, of course, a consequence of this investigation that the very terms 'success' and 'failure' are also more subtly defined.**

It is also not entirely useful to consider them 'the' revolutionaries who have done what no one else has. Their work consists of, and insists on, the very conventions of experimentation they often intermix, resist and extend. This whole line of questioning needs to be modified. What sort of values, both poetic and political, that allow their work its specific kinds of negotiations with its perceived cultural game? How do they manifest themselves in the poetry itself both individually and collectively? What sort of aesthetic and / or cultural distinctions can we draw from that? These seem to be the more accurate questions to ask in our case.

¹⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, G. E. M. Anscombe (trans.), G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees (eds.), (New Jersey & London: Prentice Hall, 1953), p. 23.

This is partially the strength and beauty of our proposed conceptual grammar: *paralogy*, contradiction, *implicit coherence*, *deep parody* and the sublime; or its particular suitability for this line of questioning. That it endeavours not to restrict the value of newish textual and / or poetic devices to the idea of 'the new'; to the relatively constructivist comparisons between what has, and has not, been done before. That, in its suggested questioning of the binary essences implicated in that idea, it does not attack or attempt to negate reason itself either, or undermine the distinctiveness of these poets' work. But rather that, it suggests value and distinctiveness in terms of differential legitimization processes in which the focus is shifted from authoritative essences and illusive clarities to the means by which meanings, poetic or otherwise, can propose their own self-suspicion in their very presentation as intrinsically viable and, in the cases of Hejinián and Bernstein, also intrinsically aesthetic. The poetics of these poets, I will argue throughout this thesis, make their point by being much less significant in terms of the logic of 'either... or', 'added not added', 'invented not invented' than in the para-logic of 'both...and... or...'.

It is our suggestion, therefore, that in order to achieve a more accurate understanding and a clearer appreciation of the work of these poets, it is best to view them as the *paralogists* who negotiate with the prevailing poetic and cultural value systems the legitimacy of their own ideals and practices while attempting to undermine these very systems' underlying criteria and judgements. It is best to see them as the *ironists* who parody those systems' implicit fixations and authority by mimicking and deforming their effects, offering, instead of a stable alternative, their own paradoxical authority and fixations on incommensurable mixtures of complex freedoms to choose one's own. They are better seen as the tuners of *implicit coherence* who continually oppose and tease the narrative mind-set by offering non- or anti-discursive meanings inside and outside the implied necessities of their work's textual architecture. It is best to think of them as the *contradictionists* who challenge and contest, not for challenging's and contesting's sake, but in order to impart a stronger sense of the openness and inherent multiplicity of meaning / the absence of an empirical reality, rediscovering some of the hidden or marginalized complexities in language as the social world. And finally, it is best to conceive of them as the *sublimists* who search for those areas of aesthetic experience that lie beyond both the visible and the transparent.

Part One:

Critical Context and Conceptual Grammar

- Chapter One: Unresolved Questions: The Context of
 Hejinian's and Bernstein's Poetics
- Chapter Two: Self, Reference and Form: Language
 Poetry's Criticism and the Notion of
 Implicit Coherence
- Chapter Three: Paralogy, the Sublime, Irony (*deep*
 parody) and Contradiction:
 Lyotard and Hutcheon

Chapter One

Unresolved Questions:

The Context of Hejinian's and Bernstein's Poetics

In his discussion of contemporary American poetics including the work of Charles Bernstein and Lyn Hejinian, critic Jeffrey T. Nealon asks a particularly significant question:

How does a critic or discipline respond to a text that resists the paradigms of criticism, that always seems to elude being mastered, that puts aside the possibility of a determinate decision concerning its meaning? ¹

In one sense at least, this thesis is an attempt to answer Nealon's question. The critic can, indeed, respond to such a text if she can develop a parallel conceptual grammar capable of understanding its processes of resistance and elusion, as well as their underlying cultural and aesthetic values. But before we begin detailing the need for such grammar, perhaps we ought to first outline what Nealon means by a text that is resistant to 'meaning'. This will help us in two ways. Firstly, it will allow us to map the critical dimensions of Bernstein's and Hejinian's poetry. Secondly, it will give specific reference to this chapter's coming discussion of the critical responses surrounding their work since their beginnings in the late 1970s. Here is a poem from Bernstein's volume Rough Trades (1991) entitled 'We Sell Ice Picks, Don't We':

Spring fell off, like a mote inside a
lock. "I am pleased you took." Therefore, or
therefrom, bumptious in material exhaustion,
mannered, as a hair might harm a
hush. There is no quite like the
flounce of the bored, gnomed sea; no
magic like evanescence of Befuddlement
before a wand weary song. Be a fool, &
are ardace, shut slants of light, motive
having crawled, & tusk tubes, moreover
limned with screws, hailed as hammered
pinnacle, deputized to fall. Have
leering crusts bid scowls' election,
pirouette outweigh forlorn? Seeming's
double daily, Christ to pay, the hist'ry
not the myst'ry weds the sty. ²

¹ Jeffery T. Nealon, Double Reading (1993), p. 108.

² Charles Bernstein, Rough Trades, (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1991), p. 12.

At first glance, a poem like this might seem to the unsuspecting reader as little more than unrelated fragments of a would-be language that does not quite manage to make it through onto the page. This is largely because its typical points of emphasis challenge our reading expectations on more than one level simultaneously. Like most Language poetry, this poem's verbal economy exceeds normative grammatical rules (including punctuation and spelling), conventional generic boundaries between poetry and prose (such as prosody and rhyme) and traditional forms of diction (such as wit, formal balance and vivid authorial voice) as well as the more experimental forms of symbolised construction (e.g. Concrete poetry) that might substantiate its particular choice of vocabulary and visual form. And like most Language poetry, it challenges established concepts of the meaningful such as the narrative, the causal and the sequential as well as the structuralist ideas of linguistic referentiality such as the 'arbitrary' relationship between signifiers / words and signifieds / concepts.³ In short, as Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews acknowledge, in their introduction of The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book, 'Repossessing the Word', (1984):

Throughout, we have emphasized a spectrum of writing that places its attention primarily on language and ways of making meaning, that takes for granted neither vocabulary, grammar, process, shape, syntax, program, or subject matter. All of these remain at issue.⁴

However, more intensely than most Language writing, this poem deliberately frustrates spatial patterns of deduction. That is, the use of fragmented syntax to signify definite linkages between selected vocabulary (or meanings) usually emanating from pre-programmed methods of composition identifiable in such experimental work as that of Jackson Mac Low and John Cage.⁵ The poem offers almost no linearity of thought and, as typical of Bernstein's poetics, seems readable from any chosen phrase, line or segment.

As such, each part or phrase or word deeply disillusiones any attempt to follow it up into a logical conclusion. Figures like 'tusk tubes', or 'shut slants of light', or 'spring fell off', connote seeming contradictions not only between each other, but within themselves. How could there be tubes for tusks? We read 'Be a fool' and expect the phrase after '&' to relate in some way, however deep, to the idea of being a fool; thus our perceptual habits

³ Ferdinand De Saussure, Course In General Linguistics (1919), Roy Harris (trans.), (Illinois: Open Court, 1972), pp. 66, 67.

⁴ Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews (eds. & intro.), The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), p. 9.

⁵ See the following chapter's discussion of Cage's work: 'Dairy' (1963), p. 70.

dictate. Instead, we get 'are arcade' which is not necessarily different nor itself free from internal contradictions, but has no apparent, or apparently implied, connection to the idea of being 'a fool', insisting on keeping the possibilities of its connections open. Almost each and every sentence or phrase follows the same path. Starting with a more or less familiar idea, then profoundly breaking that familiarity by following it up with a phrase that neither necessarily affirms, nor particularly negates, the possibilities of its connections either way, allowing it to remain in an almost permanent state of signification flux.

It is tempting, therefore, to conclude, as many critics indeed have, and as we shall see in the following pages, that this poetry, specifically Bernstein's, offers 'no hidden meanings' and, therefrom, no accessible significance.⁶ With a deeper look, however, the possibilities of meaningful signification offered by this poem appear literally limitless, precisely because of its reluctance to determine the final forms of the very objects it wishes to present. It builds up various textual temporalities and continuities that largely depend on the reader, not to stabilize or finalize their probable meanings, or only suggestively to encounter their linguistic experiences, as we have come to expect from many conventional and experimental poetries, but rather to realize the fluid nature of the perception they embody and tap into the reader's own meanings accordingly.

For example, the adjectives 'flounce', 'bored', 'gnomed' in the sentence, 'there is no quite like the flounce, of the bored, gnomed sea', remains neither directly contradictory nor directly definitive with regard to the nature of that 'sea' and what is ultimately meant by it. The phrase 'there is no quite like' in the beginning of the sentence gives the false impression of a discursive order yet to come while the rest of the sentence breaks such continuity by fluidizing its reference to the sea, making it too open to seize upon by the same logic.

Questions then arise: What kind of sea does the poem mean; a sea that is both bored, flounced and gnomed? Is it a sea at all? Or, more accurately, what kind of perception do such references in the poem wish to demonstrate toward the world / reality? The poem offers these questions to the readers as an indication of their potential freedom in their own worlds. It attempts to dismantle any hints of its being able to pin down its own reality, aesthetically investing its perceptual tentativeness in its readership by offering the realization that the world is indeed always freshly doable no matter how normal or final its component objects may, still, appear. That is, to

⁶ Vernon Shetley, After the Death of Poetry: Poet and Audience in Contemporary America (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 151.

say, it invests in its readers the extent to which it poses the question of meaning and of reality at large. Put another way, the complex poetics of this poem makes its point precisely by challenging the very normative expectations of discursive associations that might ordinarily facilitate understanding of its arguments and questions.

This is not to argue, of course, that this poetry has no underlying patterns of composition, emphasizing no particular rules of perception. On the contrary, it is to show that a different conceptual grammar is needed to respond to such poetics' equally different patterns and equally different rules. It is also to demonstrate, as will become increasingly apparent throughout this thesis, how these patterns and rules base themselves primarily on an understanding of the dynamic reciprocity embedded in the nature of the relationship between language, consciousness and reality.

It is, for example, a structurally ironic kind of poetry. Its wilful deconstruction of familiar perceptual linearties harbours a *deep parodic* reflection on the extent to which our habits of signification / realization are limited and limiting. This is more visible in Bernstein's and Hejinian's poetry than in other Language poet's such as Bob Perelman's and Barrett Watten's. We read, for example, 'I am pleased you took' and expect its following phrase to somehow explain what it is we took, or how, or why. Instead, comes 'therefore, or therefrom' to frustrate those expectations, almost ridiculing them or, rather, ironically commenting on how 'finished' and, consequently, confining, they might actually be.

Considered as such, readers' frustration itself acts as a useful cultural and aesthetic tool. In cultural terms, it symbolizes both resistance to rigid forms of meaning production and concern with opening up newer pathways for dealing with the world. Aesthetically, the disillusionist parodic form in which it most often appears in Bernstein's and Hejinian's works, partially entices imagination for gestural meaningfulness beyond the immediate structural necessities of the poems themselves. Yet, those necessities, in terms of their definite choices of materials, paradoxically also evince their own forms of signification closure depending on each reading. They are not, in themselves, empty or blank, but generative, recuperative and adaptive.

As such, each disjunction, contradiction or gap in this poem, including the frustration of our reading expectations, is filled with potential for meaning. The reader may, for example, ask: does this part of the

sentence 'there is no quite like the flounce, of the bored, gnomed sea' link, or represent continuity with the rest of it, 'no magic like the evanescence of befuddlement before a wand-weary song'? Both parts of the sentence assume the same form or phraseology while seeming neither definitively linked, unlinked, nor definitively contradicted. Does 'sea' in the first part somehow resemble 'magic' in the second in some quasi-logical ways? The sea might be felt to possess certain symbolic magic, and in turn 'magic' is perhaps realized as a deep non-predictable subject like the sea. But neither reference appears sufficiently defined by the poem in a logical way. There is no familiar referentiality applied, but an indeterminacy of both substances and forms in order to entice imagination for many possible gestures.

The possibilities for deducing meaning in a structured conventional manner are also always offered. This poem neither obliterates its capacity for meaning generation in the more conventional ways nor, by the same token, affirms them. The word 'Spring', for example, in 'Spring fell off', may symbolize the cycle of life; the ever rotating cycle of historicity and temporality in which we think we live. The phrase 'fell off, like a mote inside a lock' may connote the realization of the poem that such a cycle is inherently questionable and no longer as visible as we presume; 'like a mote in a lock', and that one should be 'pleased' to see or unravel this fact; "I am pleased you took". 'Seeming double daily' may stand for reality's continuing process of destabilizing itself in the poem's eye while 'Christ to pay, the hist'ry not the myst'ry weds the sty' may suggest a disbelief in history's supposed facts symbolized by religion; 'Christ', and an equal belief in questioning; 'myst'ry', as the only path for knowledge.

On the other hand, 'Spring fell off, like a mote inside a / lock' may imply a breakage of all cycles; an affirmation of the paradoxical nature of all congenial forms, logics and reasons, and an equal rejection of the simplistic and the superficial. 'I'm glad you took' may itself be an ironic demonstration of such breakage, indicating that the breakage of cycles allows us to shift and move swiftly, if unreasonably, since there may be no point in pretending to be continuous, structured or reasonable. Similarly, 'Seeming double daily', may imply a complex understanding of the passage of time in which objects increase in seems and pretences while 'Christ to pay, the hist'ry / not the myst'ry weds the sty' may suggest the ways in which both history and religion are mysterious and incomprehensible.

In short, this poem, offers more possibilities for connotative as well as gestural meanings than our initial reactions, and many critical readings, would have us believe. It embodies an aesthetic instance of a questioning perception of the world, which, through apparently irresolvable complexities, ironizes the demands of realism for stabilities and unquestionable identifiabilities and urges its readers to rethink the world they may ordinarily perceive as inherently stable and unproblematic.

1. Classification and Definition

It is not surprising, then, that over the past three decades, the work of Bernstein and Hejinian, and of the Language group at large, has been generally perceived as 'ambiguous', 'difficult', 'radical', 'disorientating', 'bizarre', even 'distressful' and, at best, 'unaccountably strange'. For example, Marjorie Perloff's essay 'The Word as Such: L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Poetry in the Eighties' (1985) points to 'the syntactic and semantic difficulties' in the work of these poets in terms of the 'frequently ambiguous grammatical positions', 'unintelligibility' and generic undecidability often perceived by their readers and critics alike.⁷ In turn, Jerome McGann's introduction to 'Postmodern Poetries' (1990) comments on 'the styles of difficulty' often encountered in the Language poetics at the more 'primary level of grammatical disorders' suggesting that:

There is, as Allan Davis suggests, 'a new sentence' at work in this work. It is grounded, at the technical level, in what sometimes arrives as a wholesale derangement of the sentences... Indeed, sometimes it is not possible to decide whether a particular work is "prose" or "verse", "criticism" or "poetry"... "They are clearly difficult" because they put a high premium on clarity of mind and vision, ... because their work demands attention, attentiveness.⁸

However, as Bernstein points out, his poetry seems more concerned with what he calls 'the resonating of the wordness of language' than with the neutralization of traditional writing:

There is a willingness to use, within the space of a text, a multiplicity of such different modes, which counts more on a recognition of the plastic qualities of traditional genres and styles than on their banishment... The resonating of the wordness of language is manifested by the

⁷ Marjorie Perloff, 'The Word As Such: L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Poetry in the Eighties' in The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1985), p. 216.

⁸ Jerome McGann, 'Postmodern Poetries', Verse, Vol. 7, no.1 (Spring, 1990), pp. 6-7.

multiplicity of structures and of syntaxes in the small sampling here, and in the work of other equally relevant poets.⁹

Observing how 'Language poetry is as various in its manifestations as contemporary photography or sculpture', insisting on its distance from 'whatever we tend to think of as natural or immediate', Linda Reinfeld's Language Poetry: Writing as a Rescue (1996) acknowledges both the flexibility of its general agenda and the relative inflexibility of its resistance to 'logical' discourse:

Resisting the illusion of transparency, the Language poet tends to use artifice in such a way as to force open given forms and break habitual patterns of attention. For some readers, such a process is often unacceptably disorienting and strange ... by examining, and on occasion deliberately exaggerating, the effects of formal logical and linguistic structures on our thinking, it demonstrates how those structures can determine what we see and how we behave. Thus Language poetry tends to privilege the abnormal over the normal, the marginal over the mainstream, the artificial over the plain.¹⁰

As will become apparent, both Bernstein and Hejinian resist 'unifying schemes' or 'rigid structures' that may, in Bernstein's terms, impose 'the rules of the "clear" and the "orderly" functioning of language'.¹¹ But, at the same time, as I shall attempt to indicate, each of these poets reveals some kind of alternative order in which Language serves less as a window for experience and more as 'The' experience itself. More precisely, these poets attempt to foreground language's involvement, rather than neutrality, in the construction of our awareness. For them, language is variably conceptualized less as the instrument of knowledge than its substance.

Therefore, for Bernstein, resisting 'any form of normative standardization in the ordering of words in a unit or the sequencing of these units' is paramount for investigating conventional concepts of genre and poetry since 'any limits put on language proscribe the limits of what will be experienced' (CD:58-59). As Hejinian points out, she advocates a kind of 'radical textual openness' in which the author, she suggests, 'relinquishes total

⁹ Charles Bernstein, 'The Language Sampler' (1982), pp. 76,78.

¹⁰ Linda Reinfeld, Language Poetry. Writing as Rescue (1992), p. 4.

¹¹ Charles Bernstein, Content's Dream: Essays 1975 – 1984 (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1986), pp. 58-59, henceforth cited as CD.

control and challenges authority as a principle and control as a motive' resisting, in her view, 'our inclination to isolate, identify and limit the burden of meaning given to an event (a sentence or line)'.¹² Thus, Hejinian argues, initial readings are 'adjusted' and 'meanings', in their turn, are 'set in motion', 'emended and extended', and subsequently, she concludes, 'the rewriting that repetition becomes' works to 'postpone completion of thought indefinitely'.¹³ Significantly, their fellow Language poets Ron Silliman and Bob Perelman respectively identify conventional poetic concepts such as narrativity and discursiveness with the 'tyrannical privilege of totality'¹⁴ and with 'the conventional positions of (modernist) literary competence' in which 'the writer' is all but too 'powerful' and the reader is only 'struggling to catch up' (MOP:33).

However, in practice, both Bernstein and Hejinian utilize, though differently, a certain degree of *implicit coherence* on both the level of the line and the level of the work as a whole, inasmuch as each individual work, or experiment, suggests and endures. Subsequently, the reader is inspired, in the most general terms, toward certain structures of suggestive meaning rather than others despite the complexity or the fluidity these structures often maintain.

However, this does not mean that these poets' resistance of conventional concepts of closure in textual interaction is somehow ignored or minimized in practice. Rather, as we have seen in the example above, it often signifies a whole spectrum of experimental meaningfulness in which relevant opportunities for closures are *tentatively* also offered. The point of this poetry is much less to exclude than it is to include. Significantly, James Sherry (the editor and founder of Roof Press and a close friend to Bernstein) observes how Bernstein 'will not ascribe intention' to his work, and that 'what (ever) the reader will find in it is ok with Charles'.¹⁵ Yet, other critics such as Vernon Shetley in his book After the Death of Poetry (1993) considers Bernstein's work as offering 'nothing to penetrate'. A poetry, in his view, where 'no meaning is hiding'.¹⁶ Bernstein's own claims, however, are sometimes also immoderate. 'Every phrase I write', he argues in his 'Stray Straws and Straw Men'

¹² Lyn Hejinian, 'The Rejection of Closure', Manuscript to the author, (1999).

¹³ Lyn Hejinian, 'The Rejection of Closure', Manuscript to the author, (1999).

¹⁴ Ron Silliman, 'Disappearance of the Word, Appearance of the World', in The New Sentence (New York: Roof, 1977), p. 124, henceforth cited as NS.

¹⁵ James Sherry, 'A Letter to Tom Beckett', September 23rd, 1981 in The Difficulties: Charles Bernstein's Issue, Vol. 2, no. 1 (Fall, 1982), p. 43.

¹⁶ Vernon Shetley, After the Death of Poetry (1993), p. 151.

(1976), 'every juxtaposition I make', he insists, 'is a manifestation of using a full-blown language: full of the possibilities of meaning & the impossibilities of meaning. It cannot be avoided' (CD:46).

While the idea of *composition* is perhaps as inevitable as Bernstein suggests and, as we shall see, Bernstein and Hejinian fuse the intentional and the non-intentional in their respective writing strategies, the possibilities of this sort of 'full' textual openness is only partially achieved in his practice. As we shall see in more detail in part 2, this is particularly true with regard to the contrasting exactness of Bernstein's textual designs which partially signals his control over the play-area of his texts. More generally, still, Language poetry is, evidently, much less linguistically 'full-blown' than Bernstein implies. The vocabulary of techno-art (e.g. performance-, sound- and video-manipulation) for example, almost completely escapes it.

This need not be considered as necessarily a negative attribute, or else we had better be dealing with blankness or empty space. The paradoxical combination between degrees of complex closure, suggested by *implicit coherence*, and complex openness, suggested by experimental resistance to conventional concepts of coherence and closure, seems to highlight the importance Hejinian and Bernstein place on heterogeneity and as a principle of composition. As such, it also serves to underline some of the reasons behind the sense of disorientation that makes these poets' work seem difficult to relate to. For example, noting how 'it is difficult to introduce Language poetry to people who are not already involved in reading Language poetry or something like it', Reinfeld acknowledges that 'most of us, understandably, feel genuine distress when we encounter the language we think of as our own presented to us as not our own but as something that is at one and the same time intimately familiar and unaccountably strange'.¹⁷ Similarly, David Kirby's article 'The Poetry Scene Today' (1994) argues that the work of these poets 'is trying to break free from the restrictions of middle class attitudes toward art and life. As a result, it often seems bizarre and disorientating'.¹⁸ Joel Lewis's article 'Ink Mathematics: An Introduction to Language Poetry' (1990) also observes that Language poetry frequently seems a heretical aberration.

Admittedly a good deal of the poetry is difficult... This is not writing aimed at reaching the masses, but at that fierce and devoted group of believers who are already serious readers of

¹⁷ Linda Reinfeld, *Language Poetry. Writing as Rescue* (1992), p. 17.

¹⁸ David Kirby, 'The Poetry Scene Today', *The Writer*, Vol. 107, no. 3 (March, 1994), pp. 10-13.

poetry... The poetry reader has faith in the rituals of the form; the conventional handling of metaphor, closure, and narrative are not only accepted but expected, and any desecration of the tabernacle of poetry often results in the cry of 'philistine' or 'anti-poetry'.¹⁹

In this respect, as Lewis points out, Language writing is perhaps self-consciously provocative and self-consciously complex, aiming to displease or please the critic and the 'serious reader' rather than to appease the 'masses'.

2. Origins and Influences:

Unavoidably perhaps, the critical discussion of identity and the Language poets' significance concerns their origins, influences and their general position in the history of experimental poetics in America. Some critics, such as Christopher Beach, Nigel Wheale, Walter Kalaidjian and Linda Reinfeld, align the Language poets with experimental poetics such as Pound's, Ashbery's or the Russian formalists'. Others, such as Douglas Messerli, Alan Soldofsky and Hank Lazer insist that their concerns are simply too varied to form a single continuous stream of poetic traditions. Christopher Beach's ABC of Influence: Ezra Pound and the Re-making of the American Poetic Tradition, (1992), for example, argues that:

Like their predecessors in the Pound tradition, the Language poets are marked by an acute awareness of the poetic practices and concerns that form a context for experimental American writing and from which their own work is largely derived.²⁰

Both Bernstein and Hejinian are, indeed, acutely aware of early poetries' social and cultural contexts, but as Beach himself subsequently acknowledges:

Rather than constituting an entirely new tradition of writing, the Language writers are the latest manifestation of a larger tradition of experimental poetic concerns with roots in the work of Pound, Williams, and Modernist / postmodernist practice. But as is also the case with

¹⁹ Joel Lewis, 'Ink Mathematics: An Introduction to Language poetry', Poets & Writers, Vol. 18, Issue 5 (September / October, 1990), pp. 21-24.

²⁰ Christopher Beach, ABC of Influence: Ezra Pound and the Re-making of the American Poetic Tradition (Berkeley & Oxford: University of California Press, 1992), p. 238.

Pound and his descendants, the work of Language poets cannot be understood only in reference to a narrowly defined sense of poetic tradition.²¹

For Alan Soldofsky, while the Language poets' 'intellectual and linguistic concerns' owe much to 'the narcissistic preoccupation' of the 'New York School', they are also derived from 'Gertrude Stein's linguistic adventurism', 'Louis Zukofsky's application of the principle of music in writing', 'Charles Olson's cross-breeding of poetry and philosophy', 'the wide ranging perceptual plasticity and extended forms of Robert Duncan' and 'the cryptic syllogisms of Robert Creeley'. These, among others such as Burroughs, the Concrete poets, the Russian and the Italian Futurists, as the following pages will suggest, are part of the historical background from which Bernstein's and Hejinian's aesthetics are derived. However, for Soldofsky, the 'new writing' of the Language poets attempts to 'produce new meanings with old words, where in the past writers have sought to discover a new form and language which best befit the poem's intention and meaning'. Accordingly, Soldofsky concludes:

The fundamental problem with the new writing is its obsession with technique. In the effort to alter meaning, the language poets have relied on a number of devices ...to interrupt the flow of literal meaning, and the juxtaposition of unrelated ideas, images and events.²²

Significantly, as we shall see in the following chapters, the work of Hejinian and Bernstein does much more than simply produce 'new meanings with old words'. Each of these poets respectively attempts to enact, in poetic form, the moment-by-moment dynamics of signification in the interactive processes of language, consciousness and reality, destabilizing many of the known norms of poetic and textual perception in order to offer greater freedom of meaning.

Although Soldofsky conceives of their general emphasis on the social and cultural consequences of a certain number of linguistic strategies such as linearity, narrativity and authorial identity as a problematic obsession with technique, he acknowledges their distinctiveness from those who preceded them. Paradoxically, it is this

²¹ Christopher Beach, *ABC of Influence* (1992), pp. 238-39.

²² Alan Soldofsky, 'Language and Narcissism', *Poetry Flash*, no. 74 (May, 1979), p. 6.

kind of distinctiveness that marks both their continuity with the history of poetic experimentation in America and in Europe, and the variety of aesthetic and stylistic origins that their work might be said to have.

For example, while Bernstein's and Hejinian's respective aesthetics share with the Concrete poets' such as Eugen Gomringer and Robert Lax an emphasis on the visual dimensions of the written word, they also share John Cage's and Jackson Mc Low's interest in the arbitrariness of visual form. And while their disjunctive signification techniques may be seen to echo William Burroughs's and Brion Gysin's 'cut-up' methods of juxtaposing seemingly unrelated texts,²³ they may also be seen to reflect Gertrude Stein's concern for narrative displacement through de-structuring conventional rhythm, grammar and diction,²⁴ Louis Zukofsky's concern for the materiality of language and the musicality of meaning²⁵ and William Carlos Williams's emphasis on the fusion of poetry and prose and on the poem as 'a field' of interrogative intellectual 'action' in what he calls the 'dignity of language'.²⁶

Those, among others of what Beach and Soldofsky have not accounted for in literary and non-literary experimental traditions like the Romanian French Dada artist Tristan Tzara, the Italian Futurist poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the German Concrete artist Max Bill, and the French Cubist poet Guillaume Apollinaire, constitute part of the complex system of influences and origins underlying their poetics not to mention the popular influences discussed by Bernstein. Nevertheless, both individually and collectively, Hejinian and Bernstein differ significantly from these precursors. In order to highlight some of these differences, let us, for example, consider these two short extracts from William Burroughs's The Exterminator (1964), with poetic illustrations by Brion Gysin, and from Lyn Hejinian's My Life (1991):

²³ William Burroughs & Brion Gysin, The Third Mind (London: John Calder, 1979), p. 29.

²⁴ Gertrude Stein, 'Narration: Lecture 2' in The Poetics of the New American Poetry, Donald Allen & Warren Tallman (eds.), (New York: Grove Press, 1973), pp. 104-14. Also see her 'Tender Buttons' in Revolution of the Word, Jerome Rothenberg (ed.), (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), pp. 89-105.

²⁵ Louis Zukofsky, 'A Statement For Poetry' in The Poetics of the New American Poetry (1973), pp.143-46. Also see his 'Two Songs' in Revolution of the Word (1974), pp. 239-48, and his 'A' 11-15' in American Poetry Since the 1950s, Eliot Weinberger (ed.), (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1993), pp. 74-86.

²⁶ William Carlos Williams, 'Edgar Allen Poe', 'The Work of Gertrude Stein', 'Introduction to the Wedge', 'William Carlos Williams to Robert Creeley' in The Poetics of the New American Poetry (1973), pp.115-39. Also see his 'Spring and All' in Revolution of the Word (1974), 109-15, and 'The Desert Music' in American Poetry Since the 1950s (1993), pp. 3-14.

From The Exterminator, Burroughs, 1967.

EXTERMINATOR CUT SCISSORS OR SWITCH BLADE AS PREFERED CUT

CUT

United states Embassy hereabout considered that his agony was planned ... Con sufficient punishment as to be perhaps The language of ..A crowd of more than Uruguayan fears .. Hardly anyone could believe it „Communists and the Guillotine told the press: “Some youngsters have pardoned Chessman.”

EXTERMINATOR...UNDER ORDERS..AMERICAN POLICY..SWITCH BLADE..
WATCHING..²⁷

From My Life, Hejinian, 1991.

*The world gives
speech substance
and mine (mile)
stones*

My outer ear looks like a shell, and if
you put your ear to it you will hear the
gulf. The obvious analogy is with
music ... I do love to compare apples
with oranges. Many versions of
aspiration ... like Russia. The child
was held by a radical, embracing

woman, that primary homesickness I'd know as a child, as for when and where
to breathe. The woman slept on a lawnmower.²⁸

²⁷ William Burroughs and Brion Gysin, The Exterminator (San Francisco: Dave Haselwood Books, 1967), p.8.

²⁸ Lyn Hejinian, My Life (1980 & 1987), (Los Angeles, CA: Sun & Moon, 1991), p. 107.

Both of these texts seem extremely interested in the compositional function of the narrative dysfunction. Each combines textual conjunction and disjunction among seemingly unrelated sentences and phrases to generate a multitude of possible meanings. It is rather ironic, in a very positive way, that both Burroughs, who is generally associated with the novel, and Hejinian, who is generally associated with the poem, equally question the conventional boundaries between the novel and the poem only to reach a writing that is effectively neither and both at the same time. In both examples, each sentence or phrase seems located in, and simultaneously dislocated from, its own syntax, offering suggestive associations rather than explicit narrative sequences.

However, they are also dissimilar in some very important ways. Hejinian's piece is largely acknowledged to have been written in the general form of an autobiography; a genre generally associated with confessional poetics. Yet, the presence of the writer's self, here, as elsewhere in her works, as we shall demonstrate in more detail in part 3, seems deflated, disseminated and indefinite. Rather than establishing a self-expressive authorial identity, the explicit generality in phrases and sentences like 'many versions of aspirations ... like Russia', 'the child was held by a radical, embracing woman' and 'the obvious analogy is with music' as well as the implicit generality in sentences like 'my outer ear looks like a shell' or 'I do love to compare apples with oranges' serves to convey the text's willingness for readers' re-definitions.

By contrast, Burroughs's piece is written in the general form of an essay or a sort of parodic news report using his cut up technique from the front page of the New York Herald Tribune to juxtapose unrelated stories, which he highlights in the previous page of his book as follows:

QUEEN GIVES BIRTH TO SECOND SON
CROWDS CHEER IN LONDON STREETS
AFTER PLEAS BY URUGUAY

FIFTH BOMB IN
MADRID

CHESSMAN REPRIEVED
FOR SIXTY DAYS BY
BROWN

FRONT PAGE..NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE..PARIS EDITION..CUT up.. Ray Back ²⁹

Yet, despite the seeming disconnection between the phrases and sentences of Burroughs's piece, the presence of a strong authorial identity seems as recognizable as it is expressive of its writer's own views and ideology. We only have to observe, for example, the dark irony implicit in the contrast between phrases like 'his agony' and 'was planned'. Similarly notable is the social commentary implied by the contrast between 'Uruguayan fears' and 'Under Orders', 'United States Embassy', 'American Policy', or between 'Communist and the Guillotine'

²⁹ William Burroughs and Brion Gysin, *The Exterminator* (1967), p. 7.

and 'pardoned the Chessman'. Even more compelling, is the seemingly personal anger implicit in the brisk sequence of capitalized statements on the top and the bottom margins of the page like 'EXTERMINATOR CUT SCISSORS OR SWITCH BLADE AS PREFERRED CUT CUT'. This will allow us to sense the extent to which *this kind* of Burroughs writing actually exhibits a self-consciously self-expressive ideological stance.

It is not, however, in the degree of self-expressive textual openness that the differences in the poetics of these two writers appear most striking. Obviously, both writers dissect conventional narrative in their own individual ways. Rather, it is in such ways' respective emphases on different aesthetic and political priorities that their poetics truly part company. For Burroughs, as critic Robert A. Sobieszek comments 'words and language are viruses whose entire purpose is to control us'.³⁰ As such, in Burroughs's words, we have to simply 'rub out the word' in order to achieve true freedom from language's moral, cultural and aesthetic constraints.³¹ In other words, if, in Burroughs's view, 'all hate, all pain, all fear, all lust is contained in the word', then language itself becomes the target, hence his cut-up techniques. Quoting a medical description of the state of balance between viruses and their host cells, Burroughs argues:

"It is worth noting that if a virus were to attain a state of wholly benign equilibrium with its host cell it is unlikely that its presence would be readily detected or that it would necessarily be recognized as virus."

I suggest that the word is just such virus... The word of course is one of the most powerful instruments of control as exercised by the newspapers ... Now, if you start cutting these up and rearranging them you are breaking down the control systems. Fear and prejudice are always dictated by the control system just as the church built up prejudice against heretics... This is something that threatens the position of the establishment of any establishment, and therefore they will oppose it, will condition people to fear and reject or ridicule it.³²

³⁰ Robert A. Sobieszek, Ports of Entry: William S. Burroughs and the Arts (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Arts, 1996), p. 18.

³¹ William Burroughs and Brion Gysin, The Exterminator (1967) p. 15.

³² William Burroughs, Interviewed by Daniel Odier (ed.), The Job (New York & London: Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 12-34.

To be sure, Burroughs, like Hejinian, associates new uses of language such as his cut-up techniques (what he calls the 'more precise verbal experiments'³³) with the potential for relative liberation. However, for Burroughs, such relative liberation obviously does not seem enough to counterbalance the confinement effects of language on the individual.

Rather than condemning language for the limits of perception imposed by imagination and reason, as Burroughs does, Hejinian attempts to reveal its hidden ubiquities and emphasize the ways in which it could work to better represent its own complex interaction within consciousness, hence her technique of 'delayed coherence' (LOI:60) and her poetics' emphases on the meaning of continuity and on the question of being. **For Hejinian, therefore, the object of language lies not only in its effects, hegemonic or liberating, but in its paradoxical relationship to thought.** This is what she calls 'perception as non-perception':

For me ... poetry is fundamentally an epistemological project, one in which we are studying – scrutinizing – the nature of knowing and the way in which any particular "knowing" is always circumstantially embedded. Knowing, in this sense, is contextual and always shifting. Between subject and object there is a kind of resilient reciprocity, and knowing only exists in the embeddedness of that relationship. That is the reason poets have to study perception itself as the medium of knowing something – as apperception, another ambivalence, perception as non-perception, the uncertainty that knowledge in the end becomes.³⁴

In this sense, Hejinian's and Burroughs's poetics differ not only in terms of their respective formal techniques, signification rationales and textual devices concerning the aesthetic effects of poetry and the cultural roles of the author and the reader, but also in terms of their individual conceptualization of what language is, in poetry, for the individual and in the world

Offering an alternative analysis to that of Beach and Soldofsky in his The Postmodern Arts: An Introductory Reader (1995), Nigel Wheale argues that Language poetry, particularly Bernstein's, is the direct 'successor' of yet another tradition of experimental poetry; that of John Ashbery. Discussing Ashbery's 'Three Poems' (1972), Wheale equates Bernstein's proposition that poetry 'should adopt stylistic practices that undermine the false

³³ William Burroughs, Interviewed by Daniel Odier (1969), p. 12.

³⁴ Lyn Hejinian, Interviewed by Laura Hinton, Private arts, no. 10 (Spring, 1996), pp. 61-62.

clarities of the 'authoritative plain style' with what he terms 'the effect of reading Ashbery's 'Three Poems''.³⁵ For Wheale, the difference between Bernstein's and Ashbery's poetics can be summarized in the former's apparently 'explicit political intention' and 'more direct' involvement in the reception and application of 'European critical theory'. As such, Bernstein's poetry, in Wheale's view, limits the reader's 'scope of reflection', rather than expands it:

Bernstein's own poetry, however, is narrower than this [his] description suggests, exactly because it is more politically directed and linguistically disrupted than Ashbery's characteristic manner. It might be the case that a poetry which offers a more generalized subject-position for the reader to engage with actually provides more scope for reflection than texts written as self-conscious agit-propaganda.³⁶ (My Brackets)

Significantly, the 'generalized subject position' which Wheale associates with Ashbery's work in terms of what he calls 'new subjectivity' (1995:115), is specifically investigated by Bernstein as both a way of 'naturalizing' existent habits of writerly authority and an avoidance of the larger social and political questions embedded under its claims of 'truthtelling' [truth-telling], accessibility and reflectibility (CD:45). Yet, Bernstein's work is in some ways also subjective and extremely idiosyncratic particularly with regard to his style of irony, his humour and, again, his control over the play-area of his textual architecture as we shall see in part 3. However, Ashbery himself acknowledges the self-expressive nature of his work in general and of *Three Poems* (1972) in particular, as well as his use of fragmentation as a way of mimicking, or rather naturalizing, existing reading habits rather than challenging them. Commenting on *Three Poems* in an interview with Piotr Sommer (1983), Ashbery maintains that 'part of it was a deliberate exercise in writing, not about but *off* of my feelings about various people who'd been very important to me in my life'. And when asked: 'You mean just translating fragments'? he replies:

Sure, in fact in the German book there is a section of five or six pages from *Three Poems* that seems to be a nice part that can stand on its own. I think I'm just kind of accepting that universal fact that really nobody sits down – I mean, may be there're some people, poetry freaks – and reads a book of poems through from beginning to end. I think most people don't.

³⁵ Nigel Wheale (ed. & intro.), *The Postmodern Arts: An Introductory Reader* (New York & London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 215-17.

³⁶ Nigel Wheale (ed. & intro.), *The Postmodern Arts* (1995), pp. 216-17.

I certainly don't... And therefore, I give other people the opportunity that is actually quite normal procedure.³⁷

By contrast, Bernstein argues in 'The Dollar Value of Poetry' (1979), that implicit in the claims of any kind of 'natural' subjectivity, are the basic authoritative plans of the existing social fact:

The social forces hold sway in all the rules for the "clear" and the "orderly" functioning of language ... There is nothing difficult in the products of such activity because there is no distance to be travelled, no gap to be aware of and to bridge from reader to text: What purports to be an experience is transformed into the blank stare of the commodity – there only to mirror our projections with an unseemly rapidity possible only because no experience of *other* is in it. (CD:59)

Consequently, the difference between Bernstein's and Ashbery's 'subjective' experimentalism goes on a much deeper level than Wheale implies. For instance, observing that the aesthetics of Language poetry is 'politically oppositional' while Ashbery's is decidedly 'accommodational' or 'non-political', Jerome McGann's 'Contemporary Poetry: Alternate Route' (1987) points out what he calls the basic 'ideological gap' that separates their respective social and cultural commitments:

Ashbery's avoidance of a conscious political position defines the style of his postmodern address ... What we confront here, however, is not so much an issue of poetic style or poetic quality as it is a problem in ideology... The response to such a situation may be either a contestatory or an accommodational one.³⁸

Yet, McGann's distinction between political opposition and political accommodation seems too rigid to be readily applicable to the differences and the similarities between Bernstein and Ashbery. On the one hand, the philosophical problems of cultural legitimacy explored in such postmodern works as that of Bernstein present themselves, as this thesis will demonstrate in more detail in the following chapters, on a much deeper level than the simply 'oppositional' or 'contestatory'. For instance, not only Bernstein, but many Language poets, are now,

³⁷ John Ashbery, Interviewed by Piotr Sommer, in Code of Signals: Recent Writings in Poetics, Michael Palmer (ed.), (California / Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1983), p. 303.

³⁸ Jerome McGann, 'Contemporary Poetry: Alternate Route' (1987), p. 628.

and have been for some time, part of the official poetry establishment in America, holding professorial and elevated teaching positions in many of its universities, colleges and institutions. How politically “oppositional”, in McGann’s sense of the word, can that be? On the other hand, Ashbery’s experimentation with new areas of self-expression is itself equally too complex to be defined simply as politically accommodational. The problem therefore is more than just ‘ideological’; if we take this word to mean a particular set of political and methodological ideals, and does involve styles of writing, judgements of taste, social value systems and aesthetic and cultural concepts.

In short, while the differences between Bernstein’s and Ashbery’s respective poetics are much more extensive than Wheale suggests and much more problematic than McGann implies, the similarities between them are equally less definitive than Wheale suggests and less insignificant than McGann implies. Let us, for instance, examine two brief examples of Ashbery’s and Bernstein’s writings in order to exemplify the extent to which their respective poetic styles and their cultural and aesthetic concepts complement the complexity of their individual poetics in terms of both their similarities and their differences equally. Here are two extracts:

From ‘Rivers and Mountains’, John Ashbery, 1977.

On the secret map the assassins
Cloistered, the Moon River was marked
Near the eighteen peaks and the city
Of humiliation and defeat—wan ending
Of the trail among dry, papery leaves
Gray—brown quills like thoughts
In the melodious but vast mass of today’s
Writing through fields and swamps
Marked, on the map, with little bunches of weeds.
Certainly squirrels lived in the woods
But devastation and dull sleep still
Hung over the land, quelled
The rioters turned out of sleep in the peace of prisons
Singing on marble factory walls.³⁹

³⁹ John Ashbery, Rivers and Mountains (New York: The Ecco Press, 1977), p. 9.

Lips move on top of quiet
nor do I harbor preclusions
though they define me all
the same. Still can't get
off that, left in the
that ends up being more
a sense of wanting to
making angels override
creating off-the-hanger
relation that gets twisted
and argue itself out of,
stands. Opening up this
to cut out that.⁴⁰

At first glance, the differences between these two extracts seem quite striking. Ashbery's seems to offer a decidedly subjective perspective where lines and sentences tie neatly into a description of the specific way in which the poet sees his world. Bernstein's, by contrast, offers an undecided description of an undetermined world where words and phrases are comparatively free to act independently from one another and from the poet's readership perspective. Whereas Ashbery's text employs largely conventional signification methods in which meanings flow linearly from one word to the other; from one line to the other, Bernstein's employs largely unconventional methods in which connections seem predominantly open. While Ashbery's discursive textual register conveys relatively conventional feelings of unison and harmony, Bernstein's anti-discursive textual register provokes feelings of disjunction, contradiction and dissemination.

Superficially, such differences can be seen to typify the kind of radical discontinuity that McGann advocates and Wheale rejects. As I have suggested, Ashbery's poetics largely relies on conventional syntactic concepts such as self-expression, linearity, unity of experience and harmony of form and their implied aesthetic and political value-systems. Accordingly, Ashbery seems to advocate unity of experience over multi-dimensionality of thought and formal harmony over the less obviously harmonious register that Bernstein associates with 'the refusal of reduction' (CD: 381) and with the 'music of meaning' (CD: 37).

⁴⁰ Charles Bernstein, *Islets / Irritations* (New York: Roof, 1983), p. 32.

At first glance, this, in fact, can be seen to indicate the kind of 'political accommodation' that McGann equates with Ashbery's poetics, although with one very significant difference. This consideration attempts, however briefly, to take into account the aesthetic and cultural concepts and ideals that are implicated in the poetic styles of the texts themselves which McGann seemingly disregards as necessarily insignificant when compared to political or methodological orientations and identities. In this respect, 'the matter of poetic style' to borrow McGann's phraseology and the matter of ideology are, not only equally important, but overtly synonymous.

However, superficially still, the two texts also seem to share equally impressive similarities. For example, both texts attempt to maintain a degree of textual openness, Bernstein's by leaving its connections between phrases and words open, and Ashbery's by leaving the ultimate meaning of its coherent description also open. Both poets project a decidedly similar emphasis on the importance of poetic form to aesthetic communication; on the word, the phrase, the line, as the basic units of poetic exchange and on the reader as an active participant in this process of exchange. Both pieces describe, each in its own right, a specific experimental reality whose elements, no matter how incommensurable in Bernstein's case, still endure, as the poet's own. In fact, at first glance, it could be argued, as Wheale has so lucidly done, that the only difference between the two types of writing is that Bernstein's leaves its connections between its sentences for the reader to deduce while Ashbery's offers them in the text, which seemingly relates, in Wheale's view, to Bernstein's apparently explicit political 'propaganda' and Ashbery's contrasting subtlety.

As in the case of Burroughs's and Hejiniian's poetics, Bernstein's shares with Ashbery's some areas, and does not share others in complex rather than simplistic ways. On the one hand, Bernstein's work, like most Language poetry, utilizes a certain degree of what this thesis will call *implicit coherence* on either the level of the line or the level of the work as a whole, which makes it much less divorceable from the poetics of Ashbery's work than their differences would initially imply. On the other hand, Ashbery's self-expressiveness is itself no less complex and experimental insofar as it, itself, challenges conventional patterns of poetic confessionality. Ashbery's self-expressivism, as is apparent from the example above, does not, for instance, project the poet's personal anxieties, agonies, condemnations, moral judgements, preferences, emotions, taste, etc., in the same way as confessional poets such as Plath, Lowell and Ginsberg. Rather, Ashbery's work usually offers wide area meanings covered by even wider, though still authorial, perspectives. In this sense, the differences between Bernstein's poetics and the poetics of Ashbery's work seem themselves to be also similarities in so far as they

both challenge conventional concepts of self-expression. Yet, as we have seen, the way in which a poem by Bernstein seeks textual openness differs from the way in which a poem by Ashbery does, not only in terms of tone or register, but also in terms of the syntactic concepts employed and the aesthetic effects desired.

In short, linear concepts of origins and influences seem decidedly too narrow to describe the complex poetics of these Language poets accurately. Rather, the aesthetics of Bernstein and Hejinian derive from, and reflect, a complex structure of aesthetic origins and poetic backgrounds with which they form a paradoxical relationship; sharing, yet simultaneously disavowing, the equally complex individualities of these origins and backgrounds themselves. That is to say, their poetics belong to a complex system of historical relations that keeps both its similarities and differences equally interactive and reproductive. As such, it can be seen to have far more complex political, philosophic and poetic origins than most critics acknowledge. Walter Kalaidjian, for example, attempts to define the practice of Language writing according to the notion of 'textual defamiliarization' in terms of the traditional experimental poetics of 'the Russian Futurist and formalists'.⁴¹ However, as Douglas Messerli's introduction of the anthology "Language" Poetries (1987) notes:

For the "Language" poets in general major sources of inspiration have been found in the politics and social theory, philosophy, psychology, painting and sculpture, film, and dance, and one perceives that any definition by association becomes ridiculous.⁴²

Generally speaking, the textual and contextual practices of Bernstein and Hejinian can be seen to derive from the William Burroughs and Brion Gysin cut-up techniques, John Cage's and Jackson Mc Low's emphases on the randomness of form, Concrete poetry's emphasis on the deliberateness of form and on language as functional objects, William Carlos Williams's integration of poetry and prose, Charles Olson's integration of philosophy and poetry, Gertrude Stein's anti-narrative poetics, Louis Zukofsky's displacement of textual meanings in terms of verbal musicality, Ezra Pound's formal experiments with textual re-arrangements and his emphasis on the vortical movement of textual energy, and the emphasis of the Russian and Italian Futurists on formal innovation. Considered in terms of its theoretical and philosophical resources, the work of Bernstein and

⁴¹ Walter Kalaidjian, American Culture Between the Wars: Revisionary Modernism & Postmodern Critique (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 198.

⁴² Douglas Messerli (ed. & intro.), "Language" Poetries: An Anthology (New York: New Directions Books, 1987), p. 2.

Hejinian could equally be seen to echo elements of Derrida's emphasis on the paradoxicality of meaning and the inevitability of language,⁴³ Wittgenstein's emphasis on the inevitability of meaning and the causality of language,⁴⁴ Martin Heidegger's reformulation of the question of being and its linguistic dependency on the meaning of time,⁴⁵ the Marxist and the post Marxist analysis of reification and commodification, the Frankfurt school's integration of philosophy and criticism particularly Jürgen Habermas's concept of 'communicative rationality',⁴⁶ Ihab Hassan's concept of the differences between modernity and postmodernity and his emphasis on the complexity of the postmodern,⁴⁷ and Max Weber's emphasis on the temporal presence of permanent standards within individual cultural spheres.⁴⁸

In this sense, the poetics of Hejinian and Bernstein represent, in Hutcheon's words, a system that 'works from a position within' conventions and experimentation, 'yet not totally within either', 'profoundly implicated in, yet still capable of criticising, that which it seeks to describe' (POP:23). In Lyotard's terms, it is largely 'paralogic', attempting to participate in the very cultural game it seeks to undermine and change, contesting the legitimacy of the very rules upon which its own legitimacy depends. For Lyotard, this kind of aesthetic 'is not in principle governed by pre-established rules', but works without rules 'in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*' (PMC: 61,81).

⁴³ See, for example, Jacques Derrida's Of Grammatology, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (trans.), (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) Corrected Edition, Writing and Difference, Allan Bass (trans., intro. & notes), (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), and Acts of Literature, Derek Attridge (eds.), (New York & London: Routledge, 1992).

⁴⁴ See, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, G. E. M. Anscombe (trans.), G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees (eds.), (New Jersey & London: Prentice Hall, 1953), Philosophical Grammar: Parts 1 and 2, Rush Rhees (ed.), Anthony Kenny (trans.), (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), On Certainty, Desi Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (trans.), G. E. M. Anscombe & G. H. Von Wright (eds.), (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1969), and Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951, James Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (eds.), (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993).

⁴⁵ Martin Heidegger, Being and Time (1953), Joan Stambaugh (trans.), (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996).

⁴⁶ See Jürgen Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989), and 'Modernity: An Unfinished Project' (1981), in Postmodernism: A Reader, Charles Jencks (ed.), (New York & London: Academy Editions, 1992), p. 180.

⁴⁷ See, Ihab Hassan, The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1987), The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature (Wisconsin: the University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), Second Edition.

⁴⁸ See, Max Weber, From Max Weber (London: Routledge, 1948), The Methodology of the Social Sciences (New York: Free Press, 1949) and Roscher and Kneis (New York: Free Press, 1975).

Nonetheless, this kind of complexity in poetic and political philosophy is not, as I have indicated in the beginning of this chapter, so easily discernible from the poems themselves, particularly with regard to the apparently fragmented surfaces of their typical Bernstein or Hejinian signatures. Certain very important questions have to be addressed first. Primarily, as we have seen so far, and will continue to see henceforth, the question of identification: in terms of general features; textual and contextual practices and aims, and suitable descriptions; both contemporary and historical.

To that extent, there remain, still, two important questions we have not completely charted yet. The first is, of course, the age-old question of genre that we have generally highlighted earlier as one important cause for first-impression readership confusion toward Language poetry. The following pages will attempt to highlight the specificity and significance of this question to the poetics of these Language poets. The second is what sort of value do these poets place on their own theory as opposed to their poetry? Given the difficulty encountered by many readers and critics alike with regard to their poems, would not Bernstein's and Hejinian's extensive investments in purely theoretical arguments be duly considered a simple make-weight for their work's apparently nonsensical appearance as, indeed, some critics have concluded?

3. Hejinian, Bernstein and the Genre of Poetry

If conventional structures and definitions are as important to critique and subsequently resist for Bernstein and Hejinian as this thesis suggests, then the traditional rules of genre are a prime candidate for such a critique and such a resistance. This is not because such rules assume validity under an inaccurate claim for the truth, but because, for these poets, they primarily derive such validity from a position of authority; that is, *historicity, popularity and common sense*. Questioning the traditionally accepted clarity of the markers that separate the discourses of Bernstein's and Hejinian's respective poetry, prose and theory variously critiques the basic validation principles of authoritative discourse structures, even while replacing them with their own forms of conceptual control. It is in this sense that these two poets attempt to fuse the discourses of poetry, prose and theory. In his interview with Hannah Mockel-Reike, (1999), Bernstein argues:

Poetry is necessarily theoretical and it can evade this no more than it can evade its historicity. Blur poetry and poetics as I might, I do see them as distinct genres with specific traditions and I rely on the generic distinction to perform my hermeneutic oscillation between

the two. I am not promoting an undifferentiated writing, but on the contrary, I am interested in increasing differentiation of writing forms. But that means we can't take our conventions for granted... I am looking for ways to keep genres active, alive, aware of themselves.⁴⁹

However, while Bernstein emphasizes the flexibility and usefulness of these genres, most Language poets still do not provide an answer to the question; where should this genre or discourse start and where it should be seen to have reached its limits? Perelman's theoretical poem 'The Marginalization of Poetry' (1996), for example, suggests:

What I am proposing in these
anti-generic, over-genred couplets is not some

genreless, authorless writing, but a physically
and socially located writing where margins

are not metaphors, and where readers
are not simply there, waiting to

be liberated. (MOP:10)

Commenting on this poem's challenge to conventional generic boundaries, Perelman notes:

By displaying its arbitrary form, the piece is willful in challenging distinctions, claiming that, as far as genre is concerned, the act of writing confers an automatic power of definition. (MOP:11)

Perelman, obviously, sees the writing process, here, as the ultimate measure for defining the boundaries and setting up the rules of the fusion between genres and discourses. Only in writing, and therefore, in reading, will the temporal limits be set and the generic definitions assume validity, at each text and with each reading. Still more forcefully emphasizing the flexible nature of these genres, ten years prior to Perelman's argument, Bernstein's enthusiastic commentary on the Language poets' work collected in Silliman's anthology In The American Tree (1986), argues:

The work of these poets had developed primarily in relation to the materials with which they work ... no manifestos, no formulations of underlying principles, no "how to write" apart from the writing itself that at any moment has no claim except as another instance. So, implicitly, an interrogation of the meaning of any mode – of "poetry" or "theory" – and an

⁴⁹ Charles Bernstein, Interviewed by Hannah Mockel-Reike in My Way: Speeches and Poems (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 68-69.

acknowledgement that there is no escape from composition, no logic on which to base the work other than the sense developed ongoing in the actual activity itself.⁵⁰

Yet, both Perelman and Bernstein do have 'underlying principles' and sets of identifiable assumptions pertaining to where their respective poetic projects wish to go, and why. Bernstein's emphasis on language as 'inseparable from the world' (CD: 61) and Perelman's on poetry as 'a site of experiment for social and political purposes' (MOP:12) are perhaps two of the most obvious ones.

Bernstein's and Perelman's idealistic claims are obviously meant to indicate their refusal to adhere to a set of uniform writing procedures such as, for example, the principle of visual orchestration of verbal elements in Concrete Poetry,⁵¹ or the programmatic patterns of phrasal structures in John Cages' writings.⁵² As such, they attempt to emphasize the flexible qualities of the genres involved, as well as their identifiability, as apparent in the sample of Perelman's poem above.

By comparison, many of Hejinian's writings, such as Writing Is an Aid to Memory (1978), My Life (1980-1987), Oxota: A Short Russian Story (1991) and her contribution to the collaborative work Leningrad (1991) (with Ron Silliman, Barrett Watten, and Michael Davidson), exist in between the conventional genres of poetry, short story, prose, novel, autobiography and, variably, include various moments of theoretical reflections. As such, they attempt to surpass the simple mixtures of these genres' identifiable markers without denying their usefulness as interdependent constructs. That is, to argue, that unlike Bernstein's and Perelman's occasional mixing of overt generic forms, Hejinian's work most often extrapolates from the implied plasticity of these genres' boundaries what surpasses their simple identifiability in her poetics. This, as we shall see in part 3, allows the possibility of her work's recognition beyond generic identities, and not merely as an investigation into them.

⁵⁰ Charles Bernstein, 'For Change' in In the American Tree: Language, Realism, Poetry, Ron Silliman (ed. & intro.), (Orono: The National Poetry Foundation at the University of Maine, 1986), p. 488.

⁵¹ See, for example, John J. Sharkey (ed. & intro.), Mindplay: An Anthology of British Concrete Poetry (London: Lorrimer Publishing, 1971), and Mary Ellen Solt (ed. & intro.), Concrete Poetry: A World View (London: Indiana University Press, 1970).

⁵² See, for example, John Cage, A Year From Monday: New Lectures and Writings by John Cage (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), and Silence (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961).

But even with this in mind, the work of Bernstein and Hejinian, as we shall see, offers a considerable amount of consistency in the application of their own respective textual and contextual strategies. These poets' systematically variable writing philosophies can, thus, be seen as sets of un-declared, highly flexible, patterns and procedures emanating from the individuality of each poet. This would modify not only Bernstein's and Perelman's claim that Language poetry has 'no underlying principles', but more significantly, Bernstein's rejection of procedural writing as a simple 'plugging' of 'words into a pattern' (CD:41).

Silliman's views elaborate more accurately the ways in which his work and, paradoxically, the work of Bernstein and Hejinian, incorporate their respective concepts of the relationship between theory and poetry in their writings. He argues:

The writer cannot organize her desires for writing without some vision of the world toward which one hopes to work, and without having some concept of how literature might participate in such a future...Every mode of poem is the manifestation of some set of assumptions. It's not more foolish to be conscious of them – and their implications extending into the daily life of the real world – than it is to actually have some idea how to drive before getting behind the wheel of a car. (NS:59, 62)

Some critics, however, see these poets' emphases on the surrogate relationship of their poetry and their theory as a simple attempt to justify the former by use of the latter. Writing in his article 'Comment: Without Admonition' (1987), David Bromwich satirically concludes:

There is a problem, perhaps a minor one, about "the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets,"... They do not appear, as yet, to write good poems ... for, in a movement of this kind, there is apt to be a high proportion of manifestos to poems. In dealing with any "school" whose aims and theories have been well publicized, a sympathetic critic stands in peril of taking the wish for the deed.⁵³

If by 'good' Bromwich means *rich* in complexity and meaning, then as we have seen so far, and will continue to see in much more detail in parts 2 and 3, Bernstein and Hejinian do, indeed, write exceptionally 'good poems'.

⁵³ David Bromwich, 'Comment: Without Admonition' in *Politics and Poetic Value*, Robert Von Hallberg (ed.), (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 327, also in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 13, no. 3 (Spring, 1987).

But, if by 'good' he means conventionally coherent and narrative, then he would be right, they do not write 'good poems'. Most significantly, for Bromwich:

To go outside narrative altogether, outside a story-connected motive for thinking, except at the bidding of another story that has yet to emerge, *is insanity or just mindlessness*, but anyway the end of the argument, and not the beginning of a new kind of argument.⁵⁴ (My Italics)

Bernstein, by contrast, as the lines below indicate, questions the viability of any rigid divide between aesthetics and intellectuality. 'To what degree', he asks in his interview with Tom Beckett (1981), 'is any writing not "writing about" and even about other writings':

This question seems to break down into the relation of "writing" and "writing about" or critical / discursive writing, or essays, or philosophy, and poetry. Yet those distinctions tend to collapse when you push them, which is not to say that they don't operantly define different styles of writing and, perhaps more accurate to say, different contexts of reading and different readerships... And then, to what degree is any writing not "writing about" and even about other writings; and then, aren't all texts autonomous to the degree that they are read for themselves? (CD:397- 98)

Clearly, the differences between Language poets' ideals and practices, or 'wishes' and 'deeds' as Bromwich puts it, are more complex than his argument for the 'insanity' of the non-narrative would have us imagine. Literally speaking, the Language poets have not actually published a manifesto or had official membership to their group, much less declared any singular set of textual procedures or formats to which they would unequivocally adhere in writing and have not collectively succumbed to a uniform style or agreed on any narrow description of their common (but individually distinctive) interests, principles or concerns.

Commenting, instead, on what he calls the 'contamination of one discourse by the other' in his untitled review of Language writing for Textual Practice (Spring, 1989), Rod Mengham, even more forcefully, considers the Language poets' investment in purely theoretical debates an attempt to 'make weight' for what he sees as the lack of aesthetic capability in their work. In Mengham's words:

⁵⁴ David Bromwich, 'Comment: Without Admonition' (1987), p. 328.

Close inspection of the two modes of writing shows how the paradox in their relationship is not just an accident of publishing history and that an awkward congruence, a contamination of one discourse by the other, is at the basis of their intended unity ... Without the buttress of theory, 'Language' poetry achieves a density of surface effects whose potential function is unresolved.⁵⁵

At one level, Mengham's argument seems concerned with the re-enforcement of traditional generic boundaries which it, perhaps wisely, avoids defining. At another, it appears interested in defining constructive relationships between the surface features in the Language poem, avoiding, rather unwisely, a discussion of the very Language theory it attempts to critique.

Hejinian, for example, differentiates between two forms of theory. The first she terms as 'theorizing' and sees as implicated in every intellectual human activity. However, because, for Hejinian, it is predominantly 'vulnerable and inquisitive', this kind of 'theorizing' is particularly pertinent to 'the poetic process'. The other, she defines as 'theorem-stating' and sees not really as 'theory', but as a 'stencil' or as an 'authoritative formulation' of various presumably 'immutable truths'. Hejinian explains:

Theory, as I understand it, is always everywhere, mutable. It is the interminable process by which we engaged with the changing world around us and made ready for the changes it requires in and from us. A theory, then, is not a theorem, a stating of the case, "an idea accepted or proposed as a demonstrable truth", a "stencil". Theorizing is, in fact, the very opposite of theorem-stating. It is a manner of vulnerable, inquisitive, worldly living, and it is one very closely bound to the poetic process. (LOI:338)

Considered as primarily negative, Mengham's argument seems to imply a rejection of what may be seen, from its own point of view, as a kind of tampering with self-evident generic integrities. Considered more positively, Mengham's argument seems to harbour a more serious question regarding the identifiability of these poets' work. With the traditional borderlines between discourses such as art and theory, genres such as poetry, prose, autobiography and novel, and constructs of thought such as ideology and aesthetics, as much blurred and

⁵⁵ Rod Mengham, 'Untitled Review', *Textual Practice* (1989), pp. 116, 24.

problematized as they are in these poets' work, how are we to identify what they have actually been writing, not in the sense of which genre, but, much more significantly, in the sense of what characteristics; what qualities?

This chapter has attempted to answer this question by charting the key general features of the poetics of Hejinian and Bernstein both in terms of their historicity and contemporaneity, emphasizing their complexity and distinctiveness by comparison to other experimental poets such as Burroughs and Ashbery. However, another key sign of the distinctiveness and complexity of their poetics is ironically evident more in the manner in which these poets *refuse to* define their own common grounds as a collective identity than in the collectivity actually implied by their own writing philosophies and theoretical ideals. Their rejection of a traditionally defined group-identity and their subsequent implication of a more experimental one combine to confirm what we have flagged before as the most suitable definition for this kind of poetic and cultural complexity. That is, their poetic discourse offers primarily *paralogical* arguments, highlighting *differential* (continuous and discontinuous) mechanisms and qualities, rather than *logical* viewpoints, highlighting constructivist mechanisms and qualities.

4. Identity Politics and the Question of Identifiability

There are two interdependent sides to this argument, each encapsulating its own dialectic; a practical side and a more theoretical or conceptual one. In practice, as we shall detail in the following chapters, Hejinian and Bernstein, on the one hand, complicatedly share common grounds. These include, their interest in extending poetic form to explore political and cultural questions (e.g. stability of meaning, the sovereignty of reality and the social role of the text) and their use of disjunctive textual principles and techniques such as non-narrativity, non-linearity and non-discursiveness. On the other hand, they also complicatedly distinguish themselves from one another both by the particularity of their respective reflections and interpretations of these common areas and by the decidedly idiosyncratic textual means through which they each attempt to enact them in their writings. Thus, they are both different and similar, not as separable qualities; in some aspects they are, in others they are not, but concomitantly; the same aspects are, and are not, at the same time. That is, to say, their poetic practices are principally *differential*; continuous and discontinuous with one another, rather than accumulative or simply compositional.

This dialectic, however, expands another equally multi-faceted dialectic in these poets' theory concerning their groups' collective identity. Although, in itself, such dialectic might not particularly mean much, it functions symbolically, in our case, to signal the prevalence of paralogy as a principal value in these poets' aesthetic and cultural conceptualizations. Bernstein, for example, like Silliman before him (1982:62), predictably rejects the collective label 'Language school' as he generally claims to resist all 'essentializing' descriptions being, in his view, the pretext of 'aesthetic rigidity':

One thing some of us involved in $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$ did share was a dislike of aesthetic rigidity – the narrow focusing of putting forward one stylistic or procedural choice above all others (a rigidity that has plagued both avant-gardists and conventionalists)... What was interesting about the work associated with $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$ is precisely that it did not represent a school or a style or a single linear tradition with a starting point and a series of red letter dates; if anything, grouping together these approaches to writing exploded the idea of a single origin, a single school. We are talking about synthesizing or grafting approaches with very different agendas, styles, origins, and concerns.⁵⁶

Hejinian, by contrast, like Perelman (1996:11) after her, finds no particular problem in actually using the collective label 'Language writing' as long as it is bound to the 'specific social moment' in which the movement has emerged in the late 1970s. Discussing Language poetry's complex collective qualities in her article 'Barbarism' (1995), part of her newly published book The Language of Inquiry (2000), she observes:

Current Language writing is in fact proving capable of responding to and progressing with new social and cultural experience... The intersecting of aesthetic concerns with ethical concerns is one of the basic characteristics of Language writing... the context in which Language writing became, so to speak, operative, and it has a great deal to do with the political concerns of the 1960s. (LOI: 322-23)

Yet, these descriptions, at least in one sense, seem themselves also 'essentializing'. Insofar as Bernstein's and Hejinian's definitions and reflections appear *authoritatively* attempting to *avoid* the *authoritative* historicity of prior aesthetic and cultural definitions, they are themselves vulnerable to the same pitfall of inflexibility that they claim to be attempting to free the readership from. In this sense too, as we have also seen in terms of their

⁵⁶ Charles Bernstein, My Way (1999), pp. 63-64.

historical pretexts, their conceptualization of the role of genre and their attitudes toward textual openness and closure, their poetics are principally differential. That is, they are maintaining and simultaneously disavowing both the possibilities of their collective identifiability and of their infinite singularities; rejecting and simultaneously re-instating similar degrees of authoritativeness.

To be sure, some critics have partially observed this paradox in the cultural practices of the Language poets. For example, William Lavender's essay 'Disappearance of Theory, Appearance of Praxis: Ron Silliman, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, and the Essay' (1996) admonishes Language poetry, particularly Silliman's, for what he sees as a 'metaphysical' valorization of theory that disguises its 'discursive practice'. For Lavender, such valorization takes place inasmuch as Silliman and other Language poets ground their argument for the fusion of poetry and theory in the classical format of theory; the essay. He argues:

At the foundation of the movement, is the paradox that intransparency, nonreferentiality, and hence the impossibility of a poetry of pure practice, are themselves grounded in theories that are specific, clearly articulated, and deployed in the transparent and unambiguous form of the essay...the insistence on the melding of theory and practice in poetry relies upon a metaphysical, transcendental definition of theory and masks its reality as a discursive practice.⁵⁷

Apart from its rather narrow reading of early Language poetry in terms of 'nonreferentiality', Lavender's suggestion identifies what purports to be a basic contradiction in the poetics of these poets. How can they claim to oppose hegemonic generic definitions in the very formats that substantiate these definitions?

There are three aspects involved in the answer to this question. The first is that in much of the work of Hejinian, for example, including her seemingly pure theoretical reflections, the conventional boundaries of these genres are not only investigated in terms of their plasticity in form, but also transcended in terms of a kind of tapping into their discourses' interdependent thought patterns. This is not, therefore, an attempt to completely obliterate the usefulness of these discourses themselves, as Lavender's argument concludes; 'for these poets theory is

⁵⁷ William Lavender, 'Disappearance of Theory, Appearance of Praxis: Ron Silliman, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, and the Essay', *Poetics Today*, Vol. 17, no. 2 (Summer, 1996), p. 181.

poetry and poetry is theory'.⁵⁸ More accurately, it is an attempt to practically demonstrate, and aesthetically utilize, the contingency characteristics of these genres' conceived boundaries in their relationships to the necessities of the writing moments themselves. As Marjorie Perloff suggests, 'the important distinction to be made is not between "story" and "prose poem" or "story" and "essay" but, as Charles Bernstein points out, 'between different contexts of readings and different readerships'.⁵⁹

Secondly, these poets' critique of reference, as will become evident in the following chapter, signifies, not so much their obsession with ideology as Lavender and many others conclude, but rather their more general cultural and aesthetic concerns with language, consciousness and reality. Ironically, for Silliman, this is precisely 'what it means to be human':

These are not to be underestimated. The nature of reality. The nature of the individual. The function of language in the constitution of either realm. The nature of meaning. The substantiality of language. The shape and value of literature itself. The function of method. The relation between writer and reader. Much, perhaps too much, has been made of the critique of reference and normative syntax inherent in the work of many of the writers here, without acknowledging the degree to which this critique is itself situated within the larger question of what, in the last part of the twentieth century, it means to be human.⁶⁰

Thirdly, and perhaps more importantly, these poets' attempt not to smooth down, or resolve, their own contradictions is not as naïve as Lavender's argument implies. In principle, as well as in its particular multi-dimensional (rather than binary) versions in the poetics of these poets, contradiction encodes a message of resistance to realism's various authoritative assumptions about the unity and wholesomeness of the human experience and condition, the clarity of social value and direction, and the instrumentality of language.

More generally, still, contradiction should not always mean nonsensicality, much less triviality, nor consistency should automatically signify meaningfulness, much less richness. The breaking of the mould, and the hold, of structuralist poetics is perhaps long overdue. The sort of contradictions found in these poets' work will continue

⁵⁸ William Lavender, 'Disappearance of Theory, Appearance of Praxis' (1996), p. 185.

⁵⁹ Marjorie Perloff, *The Dance of the Intellect* (1985), pp. 227-28.

⁶⁰ Ron Silliman (ed. & intro.), *In the American Tree* (1986), p. 19.

to be shown by this thesis as distinctive forms of complex *multiplicity* pertaining to serious paralogical motivations to disenchant their aesthetic and cultural games from certain hegemonic consistencies and false clarities. These include the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, the stability of meaning and of consciousness, the fallacy of relational inevitabilities, of sequential musts and of the performance-related definitions of value.

As such, they neither signify naïveté, nor call for Anarchism, whose whole point, by contrast, is to affirm non-specificity as the means to liberation.⁶¹ Such contradictions are not, in so many words, an automatic precursor for debasement, but often enough, as we shall see, are dynamic rationales implying positive diversity. Contradiction, for these poets, is, in so many words, a form of reasoning, itself interrogating legitimacy, and a cause, itself worthy of legitimation. For example, critic Benjamin Friedlander's discussion of one of Silliman's latest essays 'wild form', written in more or less, the same compositional philosophy of generic integration used by Hejinian and currently available online at Sunny-Buffalo's Electronic Poetry Centre,⁶² observes that:

The text as a whole aspires to a state beyond intelligibility, a paratactic state of signification in which the relations between sentences bear much of the burden of meaning... [It] embodies a contradiction that statement offers refuge from the risk of confusion, while poetics offer refuge from the risk of intelligibility. Yoking the two aims together suggests something like a desire to confront – and so transcend – the contradiction outright. (My Brackets)⁶³

In this sense, this thesis suggests that in order to increase understanding of Bernstein's and Hejinian's poetics and, in the process, tentatively foreground their works' cultural and aesthetic significance, it makes best sense to show the ways in which a definition of their works' textual and contextual emphases on differentiability, multiplicity and implicitness may actually prove to be its clearest and most accurate definition yet. Lyotard's, Hutcheon's and my own concepts, when re-conceptualized, re-defined and related to the poems of Bernstein and Hejinian will help to do just that both in terms of these poets' textual practices and theoretical ideals equally.

⁶¹ See James P. Sterba, 'Political Philosophy' in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Robert Audi (ed.), (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 628-30, and Richard T. De George, 'Anarchism' in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Ted Honderich (ed.), (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 30-31.

⁶² Ron Silliman, 'Wild Form', Internet piece: <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/silliman/wildform>

⁶³ Benjamin Friedlander, 'Poetics, Polemic, and the Question of Intelligibility', *Postmodern Culture: An Electronic Journal of Interdisciplinary Criticism*, Vol. 9, no. 1 (September, 1998), paragraphs 21,22.

Chapter Two

Self, Reference and Form:

Language Poetry's Criticism & The Notion of *Implicit Coherence*

The classical critical approaches to Language writing since its beginnings in the early 1970s have tended to essentialize a particular version of its political significance as the measure of its general poetic and cultural value. Primarily, a conceptualization of its ideals and practices as either revolutionary, counter-revolutionary, or simply as somewhere in between. The principal subjects of these approaches have been the Language poets' concepts of linguistic referentiality and of the role of the poetic self. This chapter aims to both outline the limitations of such approaches and suggest a different, perhaps more accurate, means with which to define its value in terms of tentative aesthetic and cultural distinctiveness rather than explicit political ideology.

Firstly, I will argue that these poets' ideals cannot be separated from their textual philosophy of poetic form. The combination of the two in their work reveals the rich nature of their most general poetics rather than their propagandist political activism. Secondly, I will suggest that their work's aesthetic significance is best understood in relation to their general attitude toward poetic and, more generally, textual meaning. This attitude, as we shall see, positively distinguishes Language poetry from various other conventional and more experimental poetics such as Robert Lowell's, Eugen Gomringer's, Robert Lax's and John Cage's and helps to identify its arguments for newer areas of aesthetic production in what this chapter terms *implicit coherence*.

1. The Poetics of Reference in Language Poetry

The Language poets' critique of the simplistic uses of reference in contemporary language concerns not only a questioning of a particular area of poetic signification, but also a conceptualization of language's poetic responsibilities in society at large. Two principal and complementary approaches comprise the main impulse behind these concerns. The first is Bernstein's in terms of what he criticizes as 'the conduit theory of communication' in which, he argues, 'communication' is perceived to be 'schematized as a two way wire with the message shuttling back and forth' between parties 'in blissful ignorance of the (its) transom (read: ideology)'.¹ This approach illustrates his more general emphasis on language's formative interaction *with-in* consciousness. The second approach is Silliman's in terms of what he criticizes as 'the commoditization of language' in which contemporary language is seen to have been reified as commodity (NS:12). This approach extends the language / consciousness ideal to include emphasis on the non-sovereign nature of reality.

¹ Charles Bernstein (ed. & intro.), 'The Language Sampler' (1982), pp. 75-78.

Thus, for Bernstein, individuals do not 'exist as separate entities outside language and to be communicated *at* by language'. Rather, Bernstein argues, in his introduction to 'The Language Sampler' (1982), 'there are no terminal points (me → you) in a sounding of language from inside, in which the dwelling is already always given'.² Language, in this perspective, transgresses the structuralist definitions of its communicative role as an invisible intermediary between pre-existing concepts (signifiers and signifieds) to assert its originating and generating nature.

However, in Bernstein's and Silliman's early writings of the 1970s and early 1980s, these ideas' original philosophical and aesthetic implications were largely masked by a more direct, if polemic, ideological syntax. For Bernstein, they offered a critique of standard uses of language as typifying what he calls the capitalist ways of 'Language control = thought control = reality control'. In his article 'The Dollar Value of Poetry' (1979), he concludes:

Use of standard patterns of syntax and exposition effectively rebroadcast, often at a subliminal level, the basic constitutive elements of the social structure – they perpetuate them so that by constant reinforcement we are no longer aware that decisions are being made, our base level is then an already preconditioned world view which this deformed language 'repeats to us inexorably' but not *necessarily* ... as by posthypnotic suggestion we find ourselves in the grip of – living out – *feeling* – the attitudes programmed into us by the phrases, &c, and their sequencing, that are continually repeated to us – language control = thought control = reality control: it must be decentered, community controlled, taken out of the *service* of the capitalist project. (CD:59-60)

Taking this line of argument a step further, in his article 'Disappearance of the Word, Appearance of the World' (1977), Silliman suggests that 'under the lure of 'realism'; 'the illusion of reality' in capitalist thought, 'words do not only find themselves attached to commodities', but 'they become commodities themselves' (NS: 8-10). Like most objects in capitalist reifying thought, Silliman seemingly argues, 'words' take on the "mystical" character of fetish' (NS:11) narrowing down their gestural potentials to mere 'referentiality':

² Charles Bernstein (ed. & intro.), 'The Language Sampler' (1982), pp. 75-78.

What happens when a language moves toward and passes into a capitalist stage of development is an anaesthetic transformation of the perceived tangibility of the word, with corresponding increases in its expository, descriptive and narrative capacities, preconditions for the invention of "realism", the illusion of reality in capitalist thought. These developments are tied directly to the function of reference in language, which under capitalism is transformed, narrowed into referentiality. (NS:10)

By increasing, or effectively foregrounding language's 'expository, descriptive and narrative capacities', what he calls 'the overwhelming of the signifier by the signified' (NS:16), Silliman argues, capitalistic methods of 'language' commoditization 'pass on its preferred reality through language itself to individual speakers', resulting in 'the subjection of writing (and, through writing, of language) to the social dynamics of capitalism'(8). 'Words', Silliman proclaims, become 'torn from any tangible connection to their human makers' and appear, instead, as 'independent objects active in a universe of similar entities; a universe prior to, and outside, any agency by a perceiving subject' (NS:8). 'The reality of capitalism', he insists, denies 'any value in the purely gestural', whereby the 'absence of external reference', he claims, is 'construed' as 'an absence of meaning' (NS:9).

Predictably perhaps, the critical reactions to these views, in their particularly politicized version, have dramatically varied from the overtly positive to the overtly negative. There are, however, not two, but three general critical tendencies in this regard. The first is by critics and writers such as Joel Lewis, Jerome McGann and Ken Edwards who define them, rather enthusiastically, as a 'radical interpretation of poetry'³, a 'fundamental' level of poetic intervention⁴ and a 'poetic revolution', which 'has in its fulcrum a radical revaluation of what language is' and what is 'its relationship to the individual'.⁵

The second tendency is by critics and writers such as Jackson Mac Low, Ron Mengham, Sean Cubitt and Albert Gelpi who, by contrast, consider these views consecutively, as themselves 'a kind of fetishism contributing to

³ Joel Lewis, 'Ink Mathematics: An Introduction to Language Poetry' (1990), p. 21.

⁴ Jerome McGann (ed. & intro.), 'Postmodern Poetries' (1990), p. 67.

⁵ Ken Edwards, 'Language: The Remake', *Fragment*, no. 2 (Autumn, 1990), p. 57.

alienation',⁶ a 'textual version of civil disobedience',⁷ a simple 'loss of an ability to refer, as reference', somehow in Cubitt's view, 'ceases to be a quality of speech that points towards a world'⁸ and an attempt to 'paralyse the capacity of language for change and effecting change' reducing, rather than increasing, 'the range of reference and resonance to mere spread of surface'.⁹ Other, more radical critics in this tendency, such as Eliot Weinberger, Daniel Tiffany, Fredric Jameson and Tom Clark consider these views as implying 'a loss of memory, an erasing of history' where words are seemingly 'set free from any possible meaning',¹⁰ an attempt to 'extract the word from its semiotic and ideological matrix, in order to plunge it into the jouissance of pure materiality',¹¹ a 'breakdown' in the 'signifying chain', offering 'heaps of fragments' that result from the apparent 'schizophrenia' of our age¹² or simply as 'the kind of mumbo jumbo you'd hear from a guy who stumbled into a linguistic lecture one day and walked out an instant expert the next'.¹³

The third critical tendency considers Bernstein's and Silliman's politicized views in a more dialectical light. Marjorie Perloff, for example, questions the possibility of 'critiquing capitalism' through 'calling into question' what she terms the 'normal' language rules'.¹⁴ Elaborating her argument, George Hartley suggests that 'the formal dimensions' of Language poetry are simply too 'random' to produce 'a radical critique of bourgeois ideology'.¹⁵ Offering an alternative analysis, Walter Kalaidjian, more specifically, considers the Language

⁶ Jackson Mac Low, 'Language-Centered' in L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E: Vol. 4, Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews (eds. & into.), Open Letter, fifth series, no. 1 (Winter, 1982), p. 23.

⁷ Rod Mengham, *Untitled Review* (1989), p. 124.

⁸ Sean Cubitt, 'Hypermetrics: The Co-Revolution of Voice and Machine From Typewriter to Hypertext' in Writing Aloud: The Songs of Language, Brandon LaBelle & Christof Migone (eds.), (Los Angeles: Errant Bodies Press, 2001), p. 124.

⁹ Albert Gelpi, 'The Genealogy of Postmodernism' (1990), p. 538.

¹⁰ Weinberger, Eliot, 'A Note On Montemora, America & The World', Sulfur, no. 20 (Fall, 1987), p. 195, also in his book Written Reaction: Poetics, Politics, Polemics (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1996).

¹¹ Daniel Tiffany, 'The Rhetoric of Materiality', Sulfur, no.22, (Spring, 1988), p. 203.

¹² Frederic Jameson, Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1991), pp. 26-28.

¹³ Tom Clark, 'Stalin As Linguist', Partisan Review, (Spring, 1987), p. 303.

¹⁴ Marjorie Perloff, The Dance of the Intellect (1985), p. 233.

¹⁵ George Hartley, Textual Politics and the Language Poets (1989), p. 13.

poets' critique of conventional reference an indication of their 'reliance on textual defamiliarization' practices, which places their poetics in 'high not mass aesthetics'.¹⁶

Generally speaking, Hejinian's and Bernstein's aesthetic and cultural significance exists in between these three critical approaches rather than within any single one of them. The first two approaches of critics such as Mengham, Cubitt, Clark, Jameson, Tiffany, Weinberger, Gelpi, Lewis, McGann and Edwards, which respectively dismiss and endorse Language poetry's early versions of the seventies and early eighties, consider Language writing much less problematically, and much more radically, than its merits suggest, even at that early period. For example, in his article 'Semblance' (1980) Bernstein also proposes:

Not "death" of the referent – rather a recharged use of the multivalent referential vectors that any word has, how words in combination tone and modify the associations made for each of them, how 'reference' then is not a one-on-one relation to an 'object' but a perceptual dimension ...All of which are ways of releasing the energy inherent in the referential dimension of language, that these dimensions are the material of which the writing is made, define its medium. (CD:34-35)

Even more strongly than Bernstein, in her recent interview with Larry McCaffery and Brian McHale (1996), Hejinian retrospectively maintains:

I vehemently **disagreed** that there could be such a thing as nonreferentiality in language. It seemed to me that every word, even every word-part, is screaming, calling out to its referent and grabbing as many referents as it can. You can't make nonsense with words, in my opinion. There's always some kernel of sense that somebody will extrapolate from words, even if you don't want it to be there.¹⁷ (My Bolds)

There is, however, a kind of half-truth to both these critics' claims, and to the claims of the other critics and writers of Language poetry's more substantial versions of the late eighties and nineties such as Mac Low,

¹⁶ Walter Kalaidjian, American Culture Between the Wars (1993), p. 198.

¹⁷ Lyn Hejinian, Interviewed by Larry McCaffery and Brian McHale in Some Other Frequency: Interviews with Innovative American Authors, Larry McCaffery (ed.), (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 138.

Hartley, Kalaidjian and Perloff. Tellingly, this coincides with the Language poets' own half-truth refusal to be, as Perelman puts it 'in charge', or 'firmly in control of all the meaning' in the text.¹⁸

On the one hand, challenging readers' deductive linguistic habits does not always lead, in practice, to perceptual vividness, as Bernstein suggests, but sometimes, on the contrary, produces effects of simplistic unfamiliarity and elitism. Such challenging, however, is inherently significant in its emphases on cultural consciousness, not just taste or intellectual richness, as an important measure for aesthetic relevance.

On the other hand, urging readers to simultaneously acknowledge the gestural and the referential dimensions of meaning does not automatically lead to the 'liberation of language' (NS:17) itself from hegemonic political and cultural value systems arguably encoded in its today's standard uses, as Silliman argues. In principle, as well as in practice, the 'gestural aspects of language' (NS:15) can be, and do get, to a good extent, emphasized by 'the social dynamics of capitalism' (NS:8) particularly with regard to marketing and advertising. Ironically, the Language poets' themselves use these very marketing and advertising strategies to propagate their own poetry products as evident in their own web-sites, university lectures, public readings, conferences, inclusive magazine issues and especial edition books etc. This, in fact, can be seen to describe the Language poets in a very capitalist sense as American poetry's new entrepreneurs.

Yet, readers' acknowledgement of the gestural aspects of language still assists in widening their horizons of signification. We should also note that conventional poetics are not entirely 'in control of *all* the meanings' they produce, as Perelman implies, while exhibiting, nonetheless, much narrower margins for readers' collaboration than most experimental writing including Bernstein's and Hejinián's. Again, the whole logic of this critical understanding needs to be modified.

Rather than a 'textual version of civil disobedience' as Mengham suggests,¹⁹ 'a derangement of the language from its conventionalities' as Charles Altieri's early writings indicate,²⁰ or otherwise a 'poetic revolution' as

¹⁸ Bob Perelman, 'The First Person', *Hills*, no. 6 / 7 (Spring, 1980), p. 156.

¹⁹ Rod Mengham, *Untitled Review* (1989), p. 122.

²⁰ Charles Altieri, 'Without Consequence Is No Politics' (1987), p. 301.

Edwards claims,²¹ the work of Bernstein and Hejinian re-defines an older attempt to explore language's unconventional meaning processes (e.g. Pound, Stein, Williams, Zukofsky) highlighting these poets' more general emphases on the linguistic and cultural quick-sands underlying assumptions of realism, from which they are not, perhaps inevitably, entirely excluded. Without the aesthetic codes of these poets' political views'; that is, without these views' original, considerably larger, cultural and philosophic dimensions concerning language, consciousness and reality, these views might indeed seem sumable, as Mac Low, Hartley, Kalaidjian, Perloff, Wheale, McGann and many others have done, somewhere amongst the logic of political naiveté and poetic anarchism. Yet, with their inseparable dimensions contained and considered, particularly in relation to the differences between these poets' ideals and practices to which I have referred above, these views signify a more precise and, therefore, more significant, exploration of the dimensional capacities of the poetic.

On the formal grounds, these views seem to function, more or less, as a rhetoric device; a figure of speech, symbolizing the investigative potential of these poets' increasingly complex poetics. That is to say, in short, that the kind of significance offered by these poets' ideals, particularly with regard to their early political and poetic overtones, invite consideration and assessment, not so much as a practice of ideology, but rather as a practice of poetry, capitalizing (pun intended) on these poets' original cultural and aesthetic emphases on the relationship between language and consciousness, and on reality as a perception dependent quality rather than an independent conceptual given.

In this sense, these poets' complex distinctiveness, both culturally and aesthetically, is much more interesting and important, than their direct adversity. What are the methodologies of difference they offer, from other experimental poetics, present and past, but also among themselves; how; and why? The dialectical dimensions of such questions have been somewhat sacrificed for the seemingly pressing need to define fixable political or poetic stances by these, and others, of the most significant Language critics. Geoff Ward, for example, argues:

Whatever their differences, the Black Mountain, Beat and New York Schools shared a commitment to poetry as individualistic expression. Partly a literary matter bound up with the persistence of Romanticism, this emphasis can also be read as a reaction to the sullen

²¹ Ken Edwards, 'Language: The Remake', *Fragment*, no. 2 (Autumn, 1990), p. 57.

conformity of American life in the period of Cold War. A stress on self-expression and the right to a private language unites the poetry, painting and music of the post-war years.²²

More generally suggesting that the poetics of Language writing as a whole can be summarized as a 'reaction' against this kind of self-absorption and ego-expressivism in what is commonly known as the American workshop poetry, Lee Bartlett's article 'What is Language Poetry' (1986) concludes:

The workshop poem, with its insistence on translatable experience, fails to question the historical, social, and economic context, merely accepting as given the prevailing "market value"... The issue is not, then, reference per se, but a reaction to a prevailing poetics which seems to be unaware of the social implications which hover just above its acceptance as a first given of an unquestioning referentiality.²³

Much more negatively than Bartlett, but similarly identifying the Language poets merely on the grounds of their resistance to poetic confessionalism, Clayton Eshleman, in his 'Comment on the Davidson / Weinberger Exchange' (1988), maintains:

It is too simple to say that the Treed Americans [the Language poets] plucked a few lessons from a few of the "New Americans", utterly turned their backs on everything they associated with the children of Lowell and then went into a huddle, but something like that seems to have happened.²⁴ (My Brackets)

Many more critics have attempted to define the Language poets either collectively or individually by reference to their resistance of conventional poetic confessionalism. Paul Mann's review of Leningrad: American Writers in the Soviet Union (1991); a book written collaboratively by Michael Davidson, Lyn Hejinian, Ron Silliman, and Barrett Watten, epitomizes this approach:

²² Geoff Ward, Language Poetry and the American Avant-Garde (London: The British Association for American Studies. 1993), pp. 12-13.

²³ Lee Bartlett, 'What Is Language poetry', Critical Inquiry, Vol. 12, no. 4 (Summer, 1986), p. 748.

²⁴ Clayton Eshleman, 'Comment on the Davidson / Weinberger Exchange', Sulfur, no. 22 (Spring, 1988), p. 197.

A search for a poetry beyond what these poets took to be the conventions of an older lyricism, what they often conveniently saw as the Romantic and bourgeois "voice", the coherent and personalizing illusion of an autonomous poetic subject.²⁵

Discussing the work of the Language poets 'against the background of American Lyricism devoted to the self' in her Internet article 'Leaving Lines of Gender: A Feminist Genealogy of Language Writing' (2000) Ann Vickery, still more generally, views it in terms of 'deconstructing individualist trends in the cultural production of literature' at large.²⁶ Even in encyclopaedias like The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics (1993) Language poetry is considered principally as a resistance to poetic confessionalism. Language poets such as Hejinian and Bernstein are argued to have:

developed modes of writing that implicitly criticized the bardic, personalist impulses of the 1960s and explicitly focused attention on the materiality of language itself... Experimentation in new forms of prose, collaboration, proceduralism, and collage have diminished the role of the lyric subject in favour of a relatively neutral voice.²⁷

To this extent, resistance to conventional self-expression and challenging the simplistic use of linguistic reference in contemporary language, identify two of the most rehearsed and under-achieved areas of critical reflection in the reception of the Language work. There is, as we shall see, a whole spectrum of experimental writing methodologies that challenge conventional self-expression and familiar linguistic referentiality in which Language poetry is but one participant. **Yet, its complex distinctiveness from the equally complex, non-confessional and less referential registers of such experimental poetries as Concrete Poetry and John Cage's has been largely ignored.**

Some critics, however, partially account for this complexity in terms of an attempt to integrate resistance to conventional self-expression with emphasis on the gestural materiality of language. Michael Davidson, for

²⁵ Paul Mann, 'Review Of Leningrad', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 35, no. 1 (Spring, 1994), pp. 171-82.

²⁶ Ann Vickery, 'Leaving Lines of Gender: A Feminist Genealogy of Language Writing' (forthcoming from Wesleyan/UPNE), in HOW 2, Vol. 1, no. 4 (September, 2000), Internet journal: http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/however/v1_4_2000/current/readings/vickery.html

²⁷ The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, Alex Preminger, and T.V.F. Brogan (eds.), (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. xlv.

example, summarizes the differences between the poetics of 'the new American poetry of the 1950s and the 1960s', and that of the Language poets in terms of their respective emphases upon individual and collective forms of performative gesture:

Whereas gesture for the generation of Olson and Ginsberg implied single expressive moments, recorded spontaneously on the page and realized in the oral performance, for writers of a more recent generation gesture refers to the interactive, social web in which language exists. This has been particularly the case with Language-writing which offers the most thorough critique of expressivism in post-war writing, even while building upon the earlier generation's accomplishments.²⁸

Davidson's insightful views may, indeed, help to distinguish Hejninian's and Bernstein's poetics from an earlier generation's advocacy of 'expressivism' as he puts it, or 'the poetics of identity' in Perelman's terms (MOP:36). However, their emphasis on linguistic gesture is itself also intermixed with their respective desire for a cultural consciousness that is formally and contextually enacted in the fabric of the writing itself. As Polish critic Jerzy Kutnik suggests, their work investigates 'how the form of discourse affects what can be said within it'.²⁹ Roger Gilbert's article 'Textured Information: Politics, Pleasure and Poetry in the Eighties' (1992) emphasizes this *particular* dimension of Language writing at large in what he calls 'the period style of the eighties':

It's this urge to make the pleasures of poetry somehow answerable to the intransigent realities of the social and the political world that gives rise to what I am calling the period style of the eighties.³⁰

In rather similar terms, Hank Lazer's Opposing Poetries (1996) also observes:

The greatest virtue of Language Writing is its reintegration of poetry into a fuller cultural and intellectual context, providing us with a poetry and poetics once again immersed in politics, history, and the broad range of debates in the human sciences.³¹

²⁸ Michael Davidson, ' "Skewed by Design": From Act to Speech Act in Language-Writing', Fragment, no. 2 (Autumn, 1990), p. 45.

²⁹ Jerzy Kutnik, 'Postmodern Language-Centred Writing and the Question of Ideology: A Polish Perspective', Journal of American Studies of Turkey, no. 4 (Fall, 1996), pp. 3-13.

³⁰ Roger Gilbert, 'Textured Information: Politics, Pleasure and Poetry in the Eighties', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 33, no. 3 (Summer, 1992), p. 243.

³¹ Hank Lazer, Opposing Poetries, Volume two: Readings (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1996), p. 6.

In this sense, while the emergence of the Language poets in the early seventies offers an alternative poetics to the kind of 'expressivism' Ward, Bartlett, Davidson, Gilbert, Vickery and Mann respectively observe, their work's relationship to it is, again, much more paradoxical than these critics suggest. Rather than predominantly anti- self-expression and anti- linguistic reference, or somehow pro-either categories in experimental ways, the poetics of these poets, I suggest, predominantly elaborates *paralogical* and *contradictory* intellectual and poetic impulses whose *differential* and *multiple* natures simultaneously continues and discontinues the issues and questions they pose, crystallizing these poets' larger aesthetic and cultural concerns with the interdependent fabrics of language, consciousness and reality. The most striking manifestations and definitions of these impulses appear, not abstractedly, as ideology, in some politicized poetic aberrations or figures of speech, but practically, as aesthetics, **in these impulses' own inseparable dimensions of poetic form.**

The Language poets' most general textual philosophy of meaning is, therefore, crucial to any understanding of their concepts of linguistic referentiality and self-expression, be it conventional or experimental. This philosophy does not only highlight these poets' original cultural and aesthetic emphases on language and reality, as opposed to their apparently guerrilla politics and cult poetics, but also distinguishes their work from various other experimental poetries both in formal and contextual terms. As Mike Kelleher's article 'Charles Bernstein in the 20th Century' (1999) suggests, we must form questions that better 'suit the needs of the current poetical economy':

To ask of a poem by Charles Bernstein what it produces is really to ask not *what* meanings it produces, but *how* it produces them. If we can answer this question sufficiently, we will find that *how* meaning is produced in the poem is in fact the same as *what* meaning it produces.³²

As I have suggested in the last chapter with regards to Bernstein's and Hejinian's historical precursors, concepts of genre and politics of identity, and as we shall see in our coming re-readings of their poetics in parts 2 and 3, their poetry's resistance to conventional self-expression itself incorporates highly individualistic, but complex, forms of the poetic self. Similarly, as the following pages will demonstrate in terms of the Language poets' more general signification rationale, their work's challenge to conventional referentiality, narrativity and

³² Mike Kelleher, 'Charles Bernstein in the 20th Century: A Brief Revue of Poetic Values', The Transcendental Friend, no. 11 (September, 1999), Internet journal:
<http://www.morningred.com/friend/1999/09/pages/review.html>

coherence is itself intermixed with emphasis on more implicit forms of referentiality, re-narrativization and coherence.

Let us, therefore, consider four consecutive samples of the various kinds of poetry involved in this discussion. That is, a self-expressive poetry; Robert Lowell's for example, an early experimental poetry; Gomringer's and Lax's Concrete Poetry for example, a long standing experimental poetry; John Cage's for example, and a specimen of Language poetry itself; Silliman's and Perelman's for example. In this way, we can perhaps show, comparatively, how each case's inseparable formal devices and rationales define and redefine its own ideals and views; direct, and re-direct, relevant understandings of its poetic and cultural value.

2. Self-expression and the Function of Form

Here is one of Robert Lowell's poems from his Lord Weary's Castle (1947), 'Colloquy in Black Rock':

Here the jack-hammer jabs into the ocean;
My heart, you race and stagger and demand
More blood-gangs for your nigger-brass percussions,
Till I, the stunned machine of your devotion,
Clanging upon this cymbal of a hand,
Am rattled screw and footloose. All Discussions

End in the mud-flat detritus of death.
My heart beat faster, faster. In Black Mud
Hungarian workmen give their blood
For the martyr Stephen, who was stoned to death.

Black Mud, a name to conjure with: O mud
For watermelons gutted to the crust,
Mud for the mole-tide harbor, mud for mouse,
Mud for the armored Diesel fishing tubs that thud
A year and a day to wind and tide; the dust
Is on this skipping heart that shakes my house,

House of our savior who was hanged till death.
My heart, beat faster, faster. In Black Mud

Stephen the martyr was broken down to blood:

Our ransom is the rubble of his death.³³

Generally speaking, most critical considerations of Lowell's work views it as both predominantly confessional, and predominantly distinctive in its style of self-expression. More than most poets of 'self-representation', David Kalstone, for example, suggests in his article 'The Uses of History' (1987), 'the "I" ' in Lowell's work is 'not at all relaxed or random' but 'fire-breathing' and 'manic'. There is 'an air of something being withheld rather than yielded', he argues, that makes Lowell's style nonetheless, one of a 'linguistic tease', whose 'experience is already second-hand'; 'an etiolated gesture of an etiolated frame'.³⁴ Marjorie Perloff's book The Poetic Art of Robert Lowell (1973), similarly associates Lowell's poetics with 'the realist confessional mode' that piles up 'participial phrases and adjective strings' as means by which his syntax 'guarantees the authenticity of the poets' vision'.³⁵

This poem generally confirms these critics' readings insofar as it offers its readers the kind of reality whose experience is proscribed to their re-enactment of its specific descriptions in the poem. To some extent, the poem invites its readers to participate in the constitution of some of its meanings, particularly with regard to images like 'blood-gangs', 'brass percussions', 'cymbal of a hand', 'black mud' and 'rubble of his death', constituting the kind of 'language tease' that Kalstone recognizes. Yet, a good part of this participation seems directed toward qualifying the poems' own implication of its author's particular confessions, rather than toward the reader's re-associative freedom of signification. The reader, in this sense, is seen by the poem more as an interpreter than a collaborator or a partner, and the form, as, more or less, a glove worn by the author's identity to point at confirmations of its relevance.

'Black Rock' is the name of a place in Bridgeport, Connecticut, where Lowell lived after his release from prison in 1944. His prison term, also symbolically mentioned by the poem 'year and a day', was spent in New York's

³³ Robert Lowell, 'Colloquy In Black Rock' from Lord Weary's Castle (1947) & (1974) in The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Vol. 2, Nina Baym (ed.), (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company 1998), Fifth Edition, p. 2525.

³⁴ David Kalstone, 'The Uses of History' in Robert Lowell, Harold Bloom (ed.), (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), p. 93.

³⁵ Marjorie Perloff, The Poetic Art of Robert Lowell (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), p. 108.

West Street jail for opposing the Allied bombardment of Hamburg and the Allied policies of unconditional surrender during the Second World War.³⁶ 'Black Rock' had a large Hungarian population living mainly on fishing and suffering from poverty and War depression in run-down places called 'mud flats'. 'Black Rock', as a name of a place, but also as a symbolic gesture of suffering, is used by the poem several times in conjunction with 'mud flats' to become 'Black mud' conveying the poet's apocalyptic vision of a bleak future. It, therefore, connotes not only the identity of the poet, as the tortured soul of a savage humanity, but also the time and place of the poem's writing. The name of the place becomes itself a symbol of the world at large; an abstraction that reveals the whole; a good representative of the world's inhumane conditions. Even the repetitive symbolic reference to religious figures such as 'Stephen the martyr', or Saint Stephen Promartyr (the first Christian to sacrifice himself for Christ) can easily be attributed to Lowell's own conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1940.³⁷

In terms of referentiality, it seems that every part of the world the poem proposes is decided or laid in advance - 'second hand' in Kalstone's words) with the determinism of the poet's mastery over his own world. The place is 'Black Rock' with its symbolic reference to hardship and despair, where 'the jack-hammer jabs the ocean' and 'the Diesel fishing tubs' 'thud', symbolizing the economic suffering of its people in the poet's eye, struggling, 'jabs', 'thud', in vain against impossible odds 'the ocean'. It is also where the poet's soul, 'My heart', is tormented by such misery and depression 'rattled screw and footloose' demanding more life energy, 'more blood', in order to deal with the profound feeling of devotion to his people and with his sadness about their perceived sufferings, 'the stunned machine of your devotion'.

The conclusion is depicted by reference to the pronoun 'our', in 'our saviour', implying humanity at large and suggesting that the salvation of humanity 'our ransom' lies paradoxically in the suffering caused by humans and the sacrifices they make for it, 'our ransom is the rubble of his death'. Nevertheless, this kind of complex figuration maintains a degree of reader participation in deciphering the meanings implied by the poem.

³⁶ Nina Baym (ed.), The Norton Anthology of American Literature (1998), p. 2523.

³⁷ Richard Gray, American Poetry of the Twentieth Century (New York & London: Longman, 1990), p. 252.

However, while the word 'Colloquy' may suggest a plurality of perception; a conversation or some kind of a dialogue, its context in this poem contains no other voice than the poet's own. For example, there is not one stanza in this poem where the phrase 'I', 'My heart' or 'this heart' has not been symbolically contextualized to affirm the singularity of the poet's own agonized essence over an unjust world.

In short, As Richard Gray perceptively suggests in his 'American Poetry of the Twentieth Century' (1990), the phrase 'the greatest poet of the self since the Second World War' seems to 'sum up his work' insofar as:

'Lowell's painful awareness of self, together with his anxiety over a world that seemed to him to be corrupted by egotism, led him ... to will his speech and his spirit into submission'.³⁸

It is this sort of 'will' for subjection in form and syntax that eventually minimizes readers' chances of participation in the formation of the poem's meanings, by restricting access to the imaginative potentiality of its language. Evidently, this kind of poetry has its own beauty and its own appeal. It asks of the readers to re-live the world's injustices from the poet's eyes, gratifying their identities as their sensitivities toward such feelings get re-affirmed.

3. Concrete Poetry and The Deliberateness of Form

In more ways than one, the poets associated with the Concrete Poetry movement such as the Swiss poet Eugen Gomringer, the American Poet Robert Lax and the Scottish poet Ian Hamilton Finlay, have not only rejected conventional poetic linearity, narrativity and self-expression, but also emphasized the visibility of language as an aesthetic 'object'. As early as in 1954, the pioneer Concrete poet Eugen Gomringer wrote in his manifesto 'From Line To Constellation', 'the new poetry is simple and can be perceived visually as a whole and as well as in its parts. It becomes an object to be both seen and used', and in his 1956 manifesto 'Concrete Poetry' he argued that :

With most structures the distribution of signs follows an inherent law, and certain systems can evolve therefrom. This is a matter of bare linguistic structure, and the visible form of

³⁸ Richard Gray, American Poetry of the Twentieth Century (1990), p. 252.

concrete poetry is identical to its structure, as is the case with architecture... It will not serve as a valve for the release of all sorts of emotions and ideas.³⁹

A typical example of Gomringer's work would perhaps be his poem 'Silencio' (1953), Silence, in which the visual orchestration of linguistic elements, though rather simplistically referential, resists conventional poetic linearity, narrativity and self-expression while emphasizing the materiality of its gestures to the theme of silence:

Silencio Silencio Silencio
Silencio Silencio Silencio
Silencio Silencio
Silencio Silencio Silencio
Silencio Silencio Silencio⁴⁰

By comparison to Lowell's 'Colloquy in Black Rock', this poem is clearly not about its poet's particular identity, although reflects its poet's signature. On the one hand, neither the word 'silence' nor the visual form directly suggest, or explicitly implicate, the poet's personal feelings or moral judgements. On the other hand, both the general form and the word 'silence' indirectly imply the poet's own poetic and cultural views, not by offering confessions of anxieties, but by emphasizing the deliberateness of their formal design and, as such, insisting on readers' collaboration.

On the one hand, the poem offers a visual / verbal contemplation of a general theme to which readers can, at least in principle, associate freely. There is no direct imposition of ideas, no pre-determined narrative structure, no discursive linearity of thought and no decisive judgements or final conclusions of the type Lowell's poem offers. Readers are not confined to images of invasive emotions nor coached to uphold specific conclusions in order to experience the poem. Instead, they are allowed to draw their own conclusions with little direct interference from the poem itself.

³⁹ Eugen Gomringer, 'Concrete Poetry' (1956) in Concrete Poetry: A World View, Mary Ellen Solt (ed. & intro.), (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 67. Gomringer's other manifestoes: 'From Line to Constellations' (1954), 'Max Bill and Concrete Poetry' (1958), 'The Poem As A Functional Object' (1960) are also included in this anthology, pp. 67-70. For further information about Concrete Poetry also see: Concrete Poetry: An International Anthology, Stephen Bann (ed.), (London: London Magazine Editions, 1967) and Mindplay: An Anthology of British Concrete Poetry, John J. Sharkey (ed.), (London: Lorrimer Publishing 1971).

⁴⁰ Eugen Gomringer, 'Silencio'(1953) in Concrete Poetry: A World View, Mary Ellen Solt (ed. & intro.), (1968), p. 91.

On the other hand, the poem also offers what can equally be seen as both significant avoidances or lacks and significant valorizations or over-stresses. Valorizations are evident in the poem's argument against formal arbitrariness by the intentional symmetry of its visual form and acoustic design. Avoidances are apparent in its acceptance of the normative signification field of the word 'silence', which marginalizes this word's more experimental dimensions in language.

Nevertheless, 'silence', in this particular form, can still be seen in many ways. For example, it can be seen to represent the play of silence between the visual and the verbal mediums of language; the contrasting effects of sound and non-sound, verbal and visual communication, or simply as a visual representation of what silence might imply as a significance and as a symbol. It can also be seen as a general meaning through which the poet demonstrates and endorses his aesthetic views about the importance of the visual dimension of language as 'an object' to be both 'seen and used'.⁴¹

However, by presenting the rectangular gap in the middle of the form, the poem wittingly also invokes a psychological relationship to the reader's imaginative impressions about silence. It does not, therefore, obliterate all objective connections to its readers. Rather, it underlines the significance of their participation in its processes of signification and in the formation of its codes and references without imposing on them its writer's feelings and personal judgements.

The work of the American poet / Concrete poet Robert Lax offers another example of the same kind of emphasis on reader's participation and verbal / visual openness combined with a formal resistance to poetic confessionism, linearity and conventional narrativity. Two of his poems 'Basic Form' (1962) and 'A Problem in Design' (1970), may be able to demonstrate the extent to which Lax's work highlights poetic form as an aesthetic question of perception rather than an invariable given related to the authenticity of the poet's emotions:

⁴¹ Eugen Gomringer, 'From Line to Constellations' (1954) in Concrete Poetry: A World View, Mary Ellen Solt (ed. & intro.), (1968), p. 67.

Forms	What if
forms	you like
forms	to draw
	big flowers,
	but what
basic	if some
basic	sage has
forms	told you
	that
	there is
	nothing
basic	more
basic	beautiful
basic	nothing
basic	more
basic	beautiful
basic	
basic	than a
forms ⁴²	straight line ?
	what should
	you draw:
	big flowers?
	straight lines?
	I think
	you should
	draw
	big flowers
	big flowers
	big flowers
	big flowers
	big flowers
	big flowers
	big flowers
	big flowers
	until
	they become
	a straight
	line. ⁴³

Like Gomringer's 'Silence', Lax's 'Basic Form' and 'A Problem in Design' are not concerned with their writer's inner life, at least not in the sense Lowell's poem is. And like Gomringer's 'Silence', both of Lax's

⁴² Robert Lax, New Poems (New York: Journeyman Press, 1962), non-paginated, reprinted in New Poems: 1962 / 1985 (London: Coracle Press / Ottenhausen Verlag, 1986).

⁴³ Robert Lax, Fables (New York: Journeyman Press, 1970), non-paginated.

poems employ the elements of wit and play to emphasize the visual dimensions of the written word making the shape of the poems on the page, including the empty spaces between the words and their repetition, just as, if not more, significant than the written words themselves. It may be feasible to suggest that the written words in both poems are there only to highlight the significance of the empty spaces between them and not the other way around. Unlike Gomringer's 'Silence', however, both Lax's poems present themselves first and foremost as aesthetic questions about the relationship of form, space and individual taste. 'Basic Form' starts with a repetition of the word 'form', as if to inspire the imagination to concentrate on shapes, forms and formats, and ends up emphasizing the word 'basic' much more than its initial emphasis on the word 'form', as though to suggest that the most, 'most', basic form, which the poem exists to endorse by its minimalist approach, is really the spaces between its words 'basic' and 'form', that is, empty space, and not the words themselves.

'A Problem in Design' presents this aesthetic dilemma more forcefully and appears to answer its own question by offering its shape on the page as a 'straight line'. It seems to suggest that the aesthetic possibilities of the visual versus the verbal are at their best possible scope of significance when they are both thought of, and aesthetically perceived, as one and not two separate dimensions of form. 'A Problem in Design' presents its solution to the dilemma it suggests only to reformulate a more general and, ultimately, more significant question of the relationship between emptiness versus shapes on the one hand, and judgements of taste on the other. It leaves the reader wondering 'what, if some, sage has, told you, that, there is, nothing, more, beautiful, nothing, more, beautiful, than', for example, a dot, which is simpler than a straight line since it occupies less space. In other words, if simplicity or brevity is what these poems are concerned with, then it is possible to imagine that their aesthetic investigation into the possibilities of verbal / visual form harbours a more complex question of the significance of emptiness, or transparency, as itself gratifying and beautiful when framed properly.

In terms of linguistic referentiality, insofar as these two poems present themselves as questions of form to which their visual / verbal elements are ascribed, and by which these elements are destabilized simultaneously, they remain open to the reader's participation in their processes of signification. Additionally, the presence of pronouns like 'I' or 'you' in 'A Problem in Design', serves to underline the generality of its philosophical question about form, emptiness and taste, its relevance, so to speak to 'you' and 'I'. In this sense, far from referring to the poet's own self, or identity, as a particular set of emotions or reasons, these pronouns actually foreground the scope of the poem's openness to reader's input. Phrases like 'what if', 'what should you draw?'

along with the general format of the poem on the page as an implied question, rather than a direct answer to the poem's questions, underline the investigative implications implicit in the superficial connotations of the phrase 'I think you should draw'.

However, Language poetry and Concrete Poetry differ in terms of the ends each respectively attempt to meet for their similar resistance to conventional poetic referentiality and self-expression. Concrete Poetry according to Gomringer's manifestos, aims to 'reintegrate' the poet in the existing social mechanisms by giving poetry, in Gomringer's words, 'an organic function in society again' in terms of the possibilities of its 'meaningful use' as commercial 'slogans' and 'headlines'. In other words, Gomringer's aesthetic ideals for Concrete Poetry aim more to sustain and contribute to the existing social and political status quo than to critique and attempt to change. The Concrete Poem, for Gomringer, is primarily concerned with 'brevity and conciseness' because 'in the course of daily life', he argues, 'there is a tendency for the many to be replaced by the few'.⁴⁴

For Lax, however, this minimalist approach toward language aims to follow what he sees as the 'natural' or 'the organic functions' of the body such as 'breathing and cerebral functions'.⁴⁵ Such functions, in Lax's view, constitute the true 'units' and 'rhythms' of any writing. As such, for Lax, a speech based poetics, is not just one choice among others, but a fundamental, highly personal and autobiographical necessity of formal aesthetic interaction allowing the poet's 'vision' to be 'as clear as possible'.⁴⁶ So long as 'form is the medium of exchange', Lax argues, 'the form should be clear'.⁴⁷ He explains:

I think there are units and rhythms that come naturally to you, and those are the things that determine the language. I found in writing things like the poems in *New Poems*, for example, that there was a regular stopping place for certain words or certain combinations of syllables. And I've tried other people – I've asked other people to say some of these words as fast as

⁴⁴ Eugen Gomringer, 'From Line To Constellation' (1954), p. 67.

⁴⁵ Robert Lax, Interviewed by Nicholas Zurbrugg in *The ABCs of Robert Lax*, David Miller and Nicholas Zurbrugg (eds.), (London: Stride, 1999), p. 27.

⁴⁶ Robert Lax, Interviewed by David Miller in *The ABCs of Robert Lax*, David Miller and Nicholas Zurbrugg (eds.), (London: Stride, 1999), p. 26.

⁴⁷ Robert Lax, Interviewed by David Miller (1999), p. 26.

they could, until they come to a natural pause, and they usually come to the same natural pause that I've used.⁴⁸

In this sense, both Gomringer and Lax, though differently, attempt to 'naturalize' poetry by fusing it into what they perceive as the 'natural' dynamics of the existing social and bodily systems respectively and by their similar emphasis on accessibility as the measure of poetry's experimental value. By contrast, Language poetry's resistance to conventional poetic narrativity, referentiality and self-expression, involves a wider social and political foregrounding of the implicit power structures underlying these qualities' claims of realism and digestibility, warning against the consequences of their proliferation and dominance. Bernstein, for example, argues:

What I want to call attention to is that there is no natural writing style; that the preference for its supposed manifestations is simply a preference for a particular look to poetry... that this preference (essentially a procedural decision to work within a certain domain sanctified into a rite of poetry) actually obscures the understanding of the work which appears to be its honoured bases; & especially that the cant of "make it personal" & "let it flow" are avoidances – by mystification – of some very compelling problems that swirl around truthtelling [truth-telling]. (CD:45, My Brackets)

Bernstein's, and Hejinian's, ultimate goal is to change and effect change in the social medium that is language, and in the linguistic medium that is society, by revealing the aesthetic limitations of familiar poetic coherence, referentiality and confessionality, and what they see as the repressive cultural conditions that produce them. However, as I have attempted to indicate in the last chapter (pp.17, 37), the complexity of their formal poetics often makes its point by challenging the very discursive expectations of normative associations that would ordinarily enable readership to identify the aesthetic and cultural issues their work investigates. As we shall see in the following chapter (p. 89, paragraph 2), the viability of this sensibility is perhaps only explainable by use of Lyotard's concept of 'paralogy' which defines innovation as a 'difference' (PMC:60) made in the rules of engagement for a chosen language game, altering the nature of that game while seeking legitimation by it, both at the same time.

⁴⁸ Robert Lax, Interviewed by Nicholas Zurbrugg (1999), pp. 27-28.

4. Cage and the Randomness of Form

However, to continue our argument for the complex distinctiveness of the Language poetics from various other experimental poetics, there are other examples of post-war experimental American poetry that challenges conventional poetic confessionalism in writing while emphasizing poetry's significance as an interrogative, cultural and political force. The work of the composer, poet and multi-media artist John Cage may be one of the most obvious examples. Let us consider, for instance, this part of Cage's work 'Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)' from his book A Year From Monday (1967):

XIV. since the
Spirit's omnipresent, there's a difference
in things but no difference in spirit.
McLuhan was able to say "the medium is
the message" because he started from
no concern with content. Or choose
quantity, not quality (we get
quality willy nilly): i.e. we'd like
to stay alive, the changes that are
taking place are so many and so
interesting. Composition'll have, he
said, less and less to do with what
happens. Things happen more
quickly. One of the signs you'll get
that'll tell you things are going well is
that you and everyone else you know will
be inhabiting light weight Dymaxion
houses, disengaged from ownership and
from violated Earth spot (read
Fuller).⁴⁹

⁴⁹ John Cage, 'Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)' (1963) in A Year From Monday (1967), pp. 10-12.

Unlike Gomringer's and Lax's poems, which emphasize the deliberateness of their visual forms as one of the most, if not the most, pivotal element of composition, Cage's 'Diary' generally appears to emphasize the arbitrariness of its visual form. In fact, most of Cage's musical and linguistic works appear to both question individual intention or deliberateness, and attempt to eliminate it by employing what he calls 'chance operations' or 'composition as process'⁵⁰, which seems quite reminiscent of the spirit of Burroughs's cut-up writings. For example, in this piece, there does not seem to be any specific order that determines which typeface or size followed from one word or line to the next. The general look of this part of Cage's 'Diary', which seems to take the shape of a rough zigzag, varies in other parts of the book from straight to plain haphazard. This is also the case in terms of the distances between lines and words. Describing the process of composing this work in his book A Year From Monday (1967), Cage notes:

It is a mosaic of ideas, statements, words, and stories. It is also a diary. For each day, I determined by chance operations how many parts of the mosaic I would write and how many words there would be in each. The number of words per day was to equal, or, by the last statement written, to exceed one hundred words... I used twelve different type faces, letting chance operations determine which face would be used for which statement.⁵¹

It is obvious that this work does not play with its visual form in the same way Gomringer's 'Silence' or Lax's 'Basic Form' and 'A Problem in Design' respectively do. It does not, in other words, derive its significance from the reconciliation, or contrast, between the meanings implied by its visual form and the meanings implied by its words. Rather, the *deliberate arbitrariness* of its visual form attempts to interrogate, on the one hand, the divide between the visual and the linguistic planes of significance and, on the other, the whole idea of the visual versus the textual meanings. As such, it derives its significance from the combination of the arbitrariness of its visual form and the meanings of its words, both attempting to disenchant the reader from these dualities. In this sense, the arbitrariness of this piece's visual form counts for much more than just a decorative gesture.⁵²

⁵⁰ John Cage, Silence (1961), p. 18.

⁵¹ John Cage, A Year From Monday (1967), p. 3.

⁵² Marjorie Perloff, for instance, suggests that the arbitrariness of this work's visual form is a type of 'gimmickry' representing 'elaborate typographical games' in which there is 'no real connection between the typeface of a given word group and the meaning it conveys'. In her view, 'the best we can say for the constant shifts in visual appearance and the jagged right margins is that these devices demand special attention from the reader'. Perloff, The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 308.

On the one hand, it foregrounds the aesthetic restrictions underlying conventional writing qualities such as 'symmetry' and 'balance'. On the other hand, it argues that there are no 'natural', or more 'truthful', ways of discovering meanings than others. In short, such arbitrariness attempts to show that poetry should not be a medium of accommodation for conventional pre-determined concepts of the 'natural', be it the natural functions of the body or the nature of contemporary commodified social life, but a destabilizing and interrogating force of aesthetic and cultural investigation and exploration. In this sense, this piece's suggestion that 'the medium is the message' seems itself to echo the significance of its arbitrary visual form.

However, there seems to be two conflicting sides to the poetics of *this kind* of Cage's writings. On the one hand, this part of the work offers what Cage himself terms 'a kind of fertilisation of ideas'⁵³ in which the writer and, in turn, the reader are relatively free to explore multiple levels of signification suggested by both the generality of the poem's ideas and the arbitrariness of its visual form. On the other hand, this part of Cage's 'Diary' observes some decidedly conventional syntactic concepts and standards. These include logical sequence, legibility and linear or explicit coherence in terms of both the lines and sentences, and the general poetic form. Eventually, these conventional concepts and standards work to confine the reader's associations to the framework of their normative signification methods and referentiality. This kind of discursive patterns of spatial deduction, which I have flagged in the beginning of the last chapter (p.15, paragraph 2), marks perhaps one of the most distinguishing features of *this kind* of Cage's writings by comparison to the poetics of such Language poets as Bernstein, Hejinian, Silliman and Perelman.

Take, for example, the word 'composition' in the sentence 'Composition'll have, he said, less and less to do with what happens'. In one sense, this word seems to exhibit the sort of contextual openness to re-interpretation that the arbitrariness of the poem's visual form attempts to advocate. The work itself does not seem to offer a decisive definition as to what sort of composition it exactly means. Is it 'composition' as an artistic technique, as a process, or is it composition in the general more philosophical meaning of the word; composition in all that is done, thought or said? The reader, in this sense, is free to enlist a relatively wide range of contexts for interpreting the significance of this word and its final meaning.

⁵³ John Cage, Interviewed by Nicholas Zurbrugg, *Art & Design*, profile no. 45 (London, 1995), p. 19.

However, in another sense, the reader's explorative gestures are considerably confined to the choices imposed by this work's pre-determined syntactic associations to what precedes and follows this word respectively. 'Composition', in the work's eye, is permanently linked with 'what happens' as well as with all other ideas in this part of Cage's 'Diary' such as the 'the spirit's omnipresence', 'things happen more quickly', the 'Dymaxion houses', and the 'measurement of time'. These kinds of linkages or conjunctions are defined clearly by the syntax with conjunctive words such as 'since' or 'because' either by their physical or implied presence in the text. In this sense, this piece's general structure of meanings limits the re-associative gestures implicit in this word's general appearance to its own deductive sequence of meanings; to its own explicit methods of coherence.

As such, Cage's interrogation of self-expression and discursive referentiality as well as his attempts for multiple layers of signification remain confined to the limits of legibility and conventional coherent meanings that *this kind* of his texts follows. 'The medium' does not seem, after all, to be 'the message', despite the work's attempt to underline its own visual arbitrariness as an argument against systematic coherence and linearity of thought. The arbitrariness of the visual form seems itself significantly combated, or counterbalanced, by the intentionally pre-programmed patterns of visual composition offered in this work. This, it seems to me, is the whole point of making such patterns clear to the reader beforehand.

Both arbitrary and intentional, the paradoxical visual form of this type of Cage's writing, though it partially succeeds in questioning the deliberateness of form, falls rather short in questioning the deliberateness of meaning. This work's underlying consistency of form and coherence of thought involve, as we have seen, a much more conventional social and linguistic framework than its general visual format initially appears to suggest.

5. Language Poetry and the Differentiability of Form

By contrast, for Language poets such as Silliman, Bernstein, Hejninian and Perelman, the cultural significance of textually or poetically challenging linear methods of signification lies not only in questioning the superficial compositional elements of conventional syntax, particularly not in replacing the intentional with the random while keeping referentiality or linearity of thought, more or less, intact, but in questioning the very logic by which language assumes familiar meanings. That is, our very concepts of the normal, the clear, the meaningful

and the nonsensical. That is, in other words, the basic validation principles of the socio-linguistic contracts according to which our judgements of significance, aesthetic and cultural, are necessarily made and practised. Obviously, this is quite a bit wider than the simple ideological equation of Marxism versus Capitalism, in which some early versions of these poets' theoretical views were largely understood. Bernstein, for example, argues:

Perhaps the conviction is that poetry not be made by fitting words into a pattern but by the act of actually letting it happen, *writing*, so that that which is "stored within pours out" without reference to making a point anymore than to making a shape. The thing is not to create programs to plug words into but to eliminate such imposed interferences. An influence of work that appears to be of this (other) type is the sanctification of something that gets known as its honesty, its directness, its authenticity, its artlessness, its sincerity, its spontaneity, its personal expressiveness; in short, its *naturalness*. (CD:41).

For Hejinian, as well:

Language generates its own characteristics in the human psychological and spiritual conditions. Indeed, it nearly *is* our psychological condition. This psychology is generated by the struggle between language and that which it claims to depict or express, by our overwhelming experience of the vastness and uncertainty of the world, and by what often seems to be the inadequacy of the imagination that longs to know it – and, furthermore, for the poet, the even greater inadequacy of the language that appears to describe, discuss or disclose it. This psychology situates desire in the poem itself, or, more specifically, in poetic language, to which then we may attribute the motive for the poem. (LOI:49)

The most striking definitions of these areas of aesthetic and cultural concern, appears in their works' principle rejection of neither arbitrariness nor deliberateness of form, of neither conventional referentiality nor pure materiality and of neither conventional coherence nor absolute fragmentation and emptiness. More importantly, these definitions become evident in their works' equal refusal to conform to any number of these qualities exclusively. In other words, **the Language poets' most general compositional practice is to remain almost always formally and contextually differential**; reproductive and connotative, rather than productive and proscriptive. This, I suggest, is the most general philosophy of poetic form offered by Language poetry. Here are two extracts; from Silliman's book-length poem *Lit* (1987) and from Perelman's poem 'Writing' (1988):

From Lit, Silliman, 1987.

Sliver. Allergic to
Detergent. Sun in
row of hard to caulk sky
lights. Think about
toilet seat. Elastic
aesthetic governs tenure,
fear. Sad old
comp prof. These
Suburban streets never
taught to curve
go right home.

Single sitting, subtle
settling predicts quake.
Insects on neutral
feed. Restart. Pair
of dimes won't
buy paper, three
ring carnies. I
is for farce
but mean that.
Brown garbage can
faded steps. Sky
heats dry streets.⁵⁴

From 'Writing', Perelman, 1988.

... and each and barely
to thing beyond perceptible
this has that to
day its an our
price immortal sins:
soul
of
sorts,

⁵⁴ Ron Silliman, Lit (Connecticut, USA: Poets & Poets Press, 1987), pp. 45-46.

burgundy	the	public
formica	smell	hair
	of	in
	Raid,	perfect
		Focus,
a	a	a
CD,	two	dark
	thousand	green
	acre	Chevy
	farm	with
	four	liver
	inches	spots,
	thick,	⁵⁵

At first sight, both Silliman's and Perelman's poems appear disinterested in expressing their writers' particular emotions and moral judgements, and certainly resist the kind of confessional authorial discourse that we find in Lowell's poem 'Colloquy in Black Rock'. It seems also clear that these poetic pieces share Gomringer's, Lax's and Cage's experimental interest in the plastic potentiality of the poetic form in terms of both the visual and the contextual effects. However, their distinctiveness is clearly also multi-dialectic.

For example, both Silliman's and Perelman's pieces do not appear to present themselves as questions about the significance of their visual forms, intentional or non-intentional. Yet, by the same token, they do not stop insinuating it either. Unlike Gomringer's 'Silence' and Lax's 'Basic Form' and 'Problem in Design' which strive to highlight their intentional visual forms as aesthetic questions of a presumably different plane of significance: namely content, Silliman's and Perelman's poems do not appear to present their visual forms as necessarily and independently significant in this way. And unlike Cage's 'Diary', Perelman's and Silliman's poems do not emphasize the arbitrariness of their visual forms either, by underlining the programmatic deliberateness that creates it, as Cage's technique of 'chance operations' does.

Rather they seem to argue that, indeed, questioning the divide between visual and textual meanings is important, perhaps even necessary. But, what is more important is attempting to enact this questioning in the writing itself, allowing a limited fusion of the visual and the textual dimensions of meaning to offer the reader the opportunity

⁵⁴ Bob Perelman, Captive Audience (New York: The Figures, 1988), pp. 17-19.

to decide for herself what sort of relevance that best befit their associative relationships to the text, rather than selecting for the reader which side of the formal equation (the visual or the contextual) should be emphasized. But, equally as important as the argument for associative signification freedom, the combination between insinuation and denial of relevance, with regard to the arbitrariness and deliberateness of form, simultaneously questions the nostalgia for familiar dichotomies and discursive orders. Metonymically, an interrogation of the relevance itself and its perceptual norms in our consciousness; how limited would the world be, if its formal dimensions are only viewed as such? Hence, again, challenging the perceptual norms that may allow recognition (and appreciation) of the challenge itself; of the legitimacy of its proposed questions?

The text is thus given the role of fusing, even confusing such dimensions to the extent that the reader often ignores the possibility of their separate existence, and is asked, instead of choosing between them, *to engage the text in multiple dimensions of aesthetic association simultaneously*.⁵⁶ Hence, the visual forms of these two poems are neither essentially deliberate, nor intrinsically arbitrary in the same sense that Gomringer's, Lax's and Cage's respectively are. Yet, they are also both deliberate and arbitrary, in a different, distinctively **differential**, sense *insofar as they do not eliminate the possibilities of their reception either way*. The forms of these poems, therefore, re-define their poets' points of aesthetic and cultural emphasis back to their original concerns with the relationship between reality, language and consciousness, and simultaneously affirm their own inseparability from their poets' concepts of referentiality and of authorial identity. Significantly, Silliman himself argues:

The primary ideological message of poetry lies not in its explicit content, political though that may be, but in the *attitude toward reception* it demands of the reader. It is this "attitude toward information" which is carried forward by the recipient. It is this attitude which forms the basis for a response to other information, not necessarily literary, in the text. And, beyond the poem, in the world. (NS:31)

On the surface, the traditional typography of Silliman's line and the partially experimental visual form of Perelman's each respectively imply two equally forceful, but arguably opposite ideas. *On the one hand, they imply that there is a contrast, or otherwise, a harmony between the meanings implied by their visual forms, and the meanings implied by their words.*

⁵⁶ The following chapter's discussion of Hutcheon's concept of 'Contradiction' in terms of what she calls the 'enunciative subject', emphasizes precisely this sensibility (see, for example, p. 107, paragraph 2).

In Silliman's poem, for example, there is a contrast because it seems possible to acknowledge the difference between what appears as discontinuous and fragmented sentences and phrases, and the consistent traditional look in which they are written as itself indicative of the poem's visual aesthetic effects. Here, the reader is offered both the familiar and the unfamiliar, the orthodox and the experimental, and it is up to the reader to decide for herself what sort of effects she would derive from such a contrast. That is, to argue that the poem's orthodox typography contrasts itself to its unorthodox signification methods in order to create an aesthetic environment that destabilizes the singularity of either in perception.

Similarly in Perelman's poem, a contrast may be seen to stem from the difference between the symmetry implicated in the visual form (the specific almost measured gaps between the words in each line and between the lines in each section which allows them to be read vertically and horizontally) and the experimental disjunctive meanings offered by the words in both reading axes. Here, the reader is offered order and disorder, visual consistency and verbal discontinuity, the familiar words and the unfamiliar signification potentials, and it is again up to the reader to decide what sort of gestures she may derive from such a contrast. That is, to argue that the poem's symmetrical visual effects contrast themselves to its asymmetrical signification possibilities to highlight their paradoxical combination in perception.

And there is a harmony because it seems equally possible to imagine the visual forms of both pieces as themselves particularly important to the meanings of their words. That is to argue that the phrases and words of these pieces' texts are significantly complemented by the impressions inspired by their respective visual forms. Here, the reader is invited to associate the gestures of the phrases and words to her own impressions about these poems' specific visual forms. In this case, the traditional look of Silliman's poem and the partially experimental one of Perelman's might be seen to act as the missing links between their respective phrases and sentences.

On the other hand, both Silliman's and Perelman's poems do not seem to offer any recognizable evidence in support of these connections, suggestions and impressions and appear, instead, to be in denial of ever being responsible for their supposition. They seem to be continuously asking; what, in these particular visual forms, could definitely be relevant to the meanings of phrases and words such as 'Sliver. Allergic to / detergent. Sun in / row of hard to caulk sky / lights. Think about / toilet seat', in Silliman's poem, or such as 'and to this day / each

thing has its / and beyond that an / barely perceptible to our', in Perelman's respectively? And if there is such relevance, is it particularly invoked by the poems themselves, suggested, or even faintly implied, or is it completely of the readers' own doing and, as such, the poems cannot be held accountable for it? In either case, would not the idea of relevance itself, and its perceptual reference to reality at large, resultantly be in need for re-constitution, for questioning? Conventional referentiality is not, therefore, completely negated, nor by the same token affirmed and used, but its givenness questioned, its inherence contested and its substitution in the differentiability of the form's proposed perception only optionally elaborated.

Thus, the poems do not advocate one dimension of writing over the other, nor place their emphasis on one effect of readership over the other. Even the possibilities for deducing meaning in a conventional sequential manner are also optionally offered. For example, in Silliman's poem, the word 'sun' in the phrase 'sun in / row of hard to caulk sky / lights' may be seen to reflect on the meaning implied by the figure 'these suburban streets never taught to curve' and its following phrase 'go right home'. Suggesting an opposition to the social and economic class divide in society, the figure seems to imply that the gulf between the classes; 'These suburban streets', is now virtually unbridgeable; 'never taught to curve', insofar as the means of achieving such bridging is not enough to 'go right home'. In this sense, allowing such obvious; 'sun', divide in today's social systems is disgusting; 'think about the toilet seat', and is reflected by similar hegemonic; 'governs tenure, fear', divides that reach from conventional aesthetics; 'Elastic aesthetic', that is both authoritative and irrelevant like a 'Sad old' professor of composition; 'comp prof', to every bit; 'sliver', of the culture that resists change; 'Allergic to detergent'.

By the same token, in Perelman's piece, while phrases like 'and to this day', 'each thing has its', 'and beyond that an', 'barely perceptible to our' do not in themselves appear to present their own sequential connections either among themselves or toward other phrases and words in the same piece like 'price immortal sins', or 'souls', 'of', 'sorts', the possibilities of 're-narrativization' (MOP:68), to borrow Perelman's own terminology, are equally offered. For example, the word 'price' in 'price immortal sins' may be seen to reflect symbolically on the remainder of its phrase 'immortal sins' to symbolize a deep resentment of today's prevailing commercialism; 'each thing has its price', reaching 'beyond that' to the human 'soul' itself, which has now become reified into all 'sorts' of other things.

Conventional self-expression and referentiality are thus seen and interrogated by both Cage and the Language poets quite differently. Cage's aesthetic experiments contest their signification abilities by contrasting their implied dualities of subject and object, form and content, visual and verbal, with the randomness of 'chance operation' implying that they are much less meaning-directed than processes of arbitrary composition. But Cage keeps a minimal amount of linearity of thought and intentionality of procedure as bearings for readers to recognize these particular areas of aesthetic and cultural contrast. In effect, although with a great deal of reservation, this kind of Cage's work, affirms the very qualities of explicit coherence and narrativity it wishes to contest by relying on their claimed inheritance to meaningfulness.

By contrast, the general compositional rationales of the work of Language poets such as Silliman and Perelman question the philosophical and political validity of these qualities' claims to aesthetic and cultural meaningfulness in the first place. By leaving no such bearing for readers' recognition, making no such preference between arbitrariness and deliberateness of form, and by neither negating nor upholding conventional referentiality, the best of their poetry defies the historical authority of these qualities; their commonsensical appearance and their popularity, and warn against what they generally view as their inhibiting and standardizing aesthetic and cultural repercussions.

6. The Notion of *Implicit Coherence*

It seems very important, however, to underline the differences in both *aims* and *composition* between what I am calling here the *implicit coherence* in Silliman's Lit, and Perelman's 'Writing', and the type of explicit, but equally complex and experimental, coherence apparent in the partially sequential meanings of John Cage's 'Diary' and the harmonious play of visual versus verbal meanings offered by Gomringer's 'Silence' and Lax's 'Basic Form' and 'A Problem in Design'. Perhaps the most striking difference between these two types of coherence is implicated in the fact that **the sort of coherence Language poetry typically employs is not offered as a condition for experiencing the works themselves, hence implicit not explicit, whereas the kind of coherence offered by the poetics of these sorts of Gomringer's, Lax's and Cage's writings, is offered as a basic condition for experiencing the poems themselves, hence explicit not implicit.**

Imagine, for the sake of the argument, that a link could *not* be established between the visual form of Gomringer's 'Silence' and the meaning of the word silence itself, or that a similar connection is somehow *missed* between the visual form of Lax's 'A Problem in Design' and the question the poem asks about the beauty of a straight line; or that a connection could *not* be realized between the minimalist visual look of Lax's 'Basic Form' and the meanings of its two words 'basic' and 'form'. It is this sort of explicit coherence in the harmonious play of the verbal / visual elements of these poems that constitutes perhaps the most fundamental condition for experiencing them.

By the same token, imagine, for an instance, that the link between the idea of 'the omnipresence of the spirit' in Cage's 'Diary' and the idea that 'there's a difference in things but no difference in spirit' could *not* be discovered or deduced; or that the connection between both of them collectively and the ideas that 'the medium is the message', 'no concern with content', 'quantity, not quality' is just not found or missed; or that similarly the link between 'things are going well' and 'inhabiting light weight Dymaxion houses, disengaged from ownership and from violated earth spots' somehow disappears or gets hidden. The poem depends on these sorts of explicit, but unconventional, connections and linkages to define its whole existence as such and thereby its experience by readership. Without such spatial patterns of explicit coherence the poem would not survive, so to speak, as itself. It would simply be another poem all together.

The *implicit coherence* of Language poetry differs from this in as much as it is not offered as a necessary formal component of the poems' themselves, but rather remain looming outside the readership orbit almost as an irritant, or, at its best, an optional hyperlink, depending on the depth of encounter with the poem chosen by a certain reader in a certain instance of readership. One could, in principle, totally disregard the interpretations given above of either Silliman's or Perelman's poems, or any other interpretation in this regard, and they would nevertheless remain the same poems with the same optional possibilities of *implicit coherence* as they were before the re-interpretation attempts. These poems' existence as such is not, in so many words, hinged on the reader's abilities to find linkages or connections explicit or implicit in them.

Of course there are degrees of the implicit and explicit coherence in both the work of the Language poets, and that of Cage, Lax and Gomringer. The work collected in cage's Silence (1961) particularly his 'Lecture on Nothing', for example, offer more emphasis on *implicit* than on explicit *coherence*. The explicit coherence

found in Lax's 'Basic Form' and 'A Problem in Design' is itself much more implicit when compared to the kind of narrative linear compositions found in Lowell's 'Colloquy in Black Rock' and is much more explicit than his own, even more, experimental multi-media work using colours and canvases. By the same token, the *implicit coherence* employed in Bernstein's work differs from that deployed in Hejinian's. The former is evidently dependent on contrasting numerous micro-completions of syntactic units, while the latter depends on an implied continuity of suggestions resisting both micro and macro completions while paradoxically elaborating various degrees of insinuations to explicit connections. Yet, in both cases, as in Perelman's and Silliman's above poems, Language writing, offers possibilities of coherence, not as a condition for experiencing the work, but rather as an available option at the readers' discretion.

In so many words then, Language poetry's most general attitude toward poetic meaning, what this chapter has called *implicit coherence*, and its particular **differential** philosophy of composition, combine to redefine its general cultural significance **from a discourse in political ideology that has failed to properly question its own political assumptions to ones in poetics that has succeeded in questioning the accepted limitations of its own cultural game**. With inclusion of issues of freedom of meaning and with emphasis on the larger philosophical questions of language, consciousness and reality, Language writing has remarkably underlined significant epistemological questions for poetry and poetics to explore.

The following chapter will complete this thesis's conceptual grammar by re-defining what we have already introduced as Hejinian's and Bernstein's particular, and Language poetry's more general, emphases on differentiality, multiplicity and implicitness in terms of Lyotard's concepts of 'paralogy' and the 'sublime' and Hutcheon's concepts of 'contradiction' and 'irony' (*deep parody* in our coming redefinition). The parts to follow will build upon such emphases in order to show how this conceptual grammar illustrates and, in a sense, also consolidates, the specific significance of the signature poetics of these poets.

Chapter Three

Paralogy, the Sublime, Contradiction and Irony (*Deep Parody*)

Lyotard and Hutcheon

This is not a discussion of Hutcheon's and Lyotard's critical and philosophical views at large.¹ Our concern in this chapter is to tentatively re-define the ways in which two of Lyotard's concepts; 'paralogy' and the 'sublime',² in his The Postmodern Condition (1984) and Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime (1991), and two of Hutcheon's concepts; 'contradiction' and 'irony', in her books A Poetics of Postmodernism (1988) and The Politics of Postmodernism (1989), help to elaborate some of the most fundamental and controversial poetics of the work of Charles Bernstein and Lyn Hejinian. Particularly, their textual concepts of the poetic self, their interrogation of the role of the reader in the constitution of the text's meanings and their resistance to formal and contextual discursiveness and narrativity.

I will therefore make four main distinctions based on Lyotard's and Hutcheon's concepts consecutively. The first is between 'invention' and 'paralogy' as two possible indexes for endowing cultural legitimacy. Invention, as Lyotard suggests, offers legitimacy according to the relatively constructivist comparisons involved in the idea of the 'new' and in terms of the discursive criteria of the system theory; progression, performativity or efficiency. Paralogy, by contrast, offers legitimacy according to the post-constructivist comparisons implicated in the idea of 'differentiality' and in terms of the non-discursive legitimation criteria of Wittgenstein's theory of the language games;³ self-enactment, inherent difference and the complexity of meaning. As such, paralogy defines the kind of difference offered by these poets from their usual cultural game, and in conjunction with this chapter's redefinition of Hutcheon's concept of contradiction, defines their implied cultural and aesthetic mentalities. However, these poets' own, highly individual, textual mechanisms and poetic techniques, as we shall see, respectively elaborate their own variants of both concepts in practice.

¹ The reference here includes Lyotard's analysis of the Kantian philosophy of the subject encompassing Immanuel Kant's three Critiques: Critique of Practical Reason, Lewis White Beck (trans.), (New York: Macmillan, 1956), Critique of Pure Reason, N. Kemp Smith (trans.), (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1929), and Critique of Judgement, J. H. Bernard (trans.), (New York: McMillan, 1951).

² Notably, Lyotard's Lessons On the Analytic of the Sublime (1991) involves a more detailed examination of Kant's philosophic interpretations and analyses of the internal mechanisms governing the subject's faculties of deduction, reflection and judgement than the purpose of this thesis allows. Therefore, our definition of Lyotard's concept of the postmodern 'sublime' primarily draws from his 'The Postmodern Condition' (1984), and his 'Answering the Questions: What Is Postmodernism' (1983), Regis Durand (trans.) while reflecting on his Analytic of the Sublime for the aspects that best elaborate this particular concept.

³ See Ludwig Wittgenstein's books, Philosophical Investigations (1953), and Philosophical Grammar (1974).

The second is between the modern and the postmodern versions of the sublime sentiment by comparison to the sentiment of the beautiful. While the modern version of the sublime offers certain equities and consistencies as substitutions for 'the unrepresentable' (PMC:78), the postmodern sublime presents no such equities or consistencies, but only the impossibility of presentation as the presentation itself. This, as we shall see, is the kind of sublime aesthetics employed in the work of Bernstein and Hejinian in terms of a search for meanings that can represent their own processes of materialization in the poems. A search, that is, by their respective compositional rationales for a poetic language capable of enacting its own formative impacts on consciousness and on reality.

The third distinction is between the form of contradiction Hutcheon associates with postmodern creativity at large in terms of 'doubleness or duplicity',⁴ and the form of contradiction this thesis associates with the poetics of Hejinian and Bernstein in terms of profound *multiplicity*. In addition to its significant function as a partial elaboration of these poets' general cultural and aesthetic mentalities, this form of contradiction also elaborates some of the most specific textual dynamics of their work particularly with regards to Bernstein's methods of poetic-self constitution and Hejinian's signification rationale. The final distinction is between two forms of contemporary irony. The first Hutcheon defines as postmodern 'parody' in terms of explicit or clearly visible quotations from past art works and generally associates with what she calls 'historiographic metafiction' (POP:5). The second, this chapter defines as postmodern *deep parody* in terms of *invisible* quotations from past, or normative, language uses and specifically associates with the work of Hejinian and Bernstein.

It is worth noting, however, that in most of the critical discussions of Language writing that actually attempt to encounter the poetry itself, as we have seen so far, and will continue to see henceforth, hardly any have attempted to face, in anything like the desired detail, the *differential* relationships of the textual particles in the poetics of the poems themselves. More specifically, fewer critics have attempted to reveal the significance of such analysis in either a definition of the particular work's larger aesthetic impact such as the 'sublime', or in a definition of its particular mental philosophy of investigation like 'contradiction' and 'paralogy', much less in a

⁴ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 1, henceforth cited as PPM.

definition of its micro linguistic and syntactic mechanisms of materialization like *deep parody* and *implicit coherence*. This thesis, thus, hopes to be the first to take on this task and assume the role of achieving it.

1. Language-Games and the Legitimation Problematic:

In more than one sense, Lyotard's concept of the 'paralogy' as 'the differential, the imaginative' (PMC:65) derives from his analysis of postmodernity as, first and foremost, the temporal thesis for the 'legitimation problematic' (PMC:29). For Lyotard, postmodern knowledge no longer derives its validity from the 'unifying power' (38) of the 'narrative' functions implicit in the principles of liberal humanism (31), the discourse of 'emancipation' and 'the rule of consensus' (37), the economic criterion of 'performativity'; 'the optimization of the system's efficiency' (24), the conceptualization of society as a 'functional whole' or, otherwise, as a dynamic dialectic (PMC:11), like modern knowledge once did. 'Where, after the metanarratives', Lyotard asks in his introduction, 'can legitimacy reside?':

The operativity criterion is technological; it has no relevance for judging what is true or just. Is legitimacy to be found in consensus obtained through discussion as Jürgen Habermas thinks?⁵

Such consensus does violence to the heterogeneity of language games. (PMC, Intro: 25)

⁵ One major argument which Lyotard's discussion of 'the heterogeneity of language games' contests is that of Jürgen Habermas in his 'Modernity: An Unfinished Project' (1981) in *The Post-Modern Reader*, Charles Jencks (ed.), (London & New York: Academy Editions, 1992). Habermas argues for the completion of what he calls 'the project of modernity' (163) which he traces back to 'the project of the enlightenment' (162) whose only mistake, according to Habermas, lies in allowing the totality of life to be divided into the specific 'value spheres' of 'truth, normative rightness and authenticity' (162). For Habermas, these spheres have been separated both from one another and from the life praxis of the individual, as their traditional questions distributed among the specific institutions of 'knowledge, justice, taste' as 'matters' left for the narrowness of 'the experts' (162). The remedy for this 'splintering', Habermas maintains, lies not in postmodernity, which he paradoxically identifies with various forms of 'conservatism', 'new and old' (167-8), but in re-effecting 'unity' to the 'aesthetic experience' of the individual by relating it to the individual's 'life historical situation', 'life problems' (166-7) or the question of existence. The only way to produce such unity, for Habermas, is through his concept of 'communicative rationality' (162); or the redirection of all of these spheres toward the concerns of the individual's existential problematics, thus, in Habermas's view, re-effecting a total 'inter-penetration' and a 'free interplay' (164-5) between these spheres in relation to the individual. The problem with this perspective, as Lyotard argues, is that it ignores the heterogeneous nature of the language-games with which he defines the social bond in society (PMC:72), as well as underestimates the legitimating powers of postmodern paralogy (PMC:60). Habermas's article is also published in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, Thomas Docherty (ed.), (New York & London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp. 98-109, and in *Postmodern Culture*, Hal Foster (ed.), (London, Pluto Press, 1983), pp. 3-16, under the title, 'Modernity: An Incomplete Project'.

Postmodernity is thus defined, if only in summary, by its profound distrust of 'the grand- or meta-narratives of the culture', where previously 'the rule of consensus', for example, functioned as a 'meta-discourse' of 'legitimation' for knowledge (PMC, Intro:23-25). Lyotard argues:

I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives. (PMC,Intro:24) The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation. (PMC:37).

As such, for Lyotard, the validity of postmodern knowledge is derived primarily from 'the linguistic practice and communicational interaction' in the temporal loci of the individual subject inside the social matrix (PMC:41) whose nature, legitimacy and rules lie in the heterogeneity that underwrites its linguistic practices.⁶

For Lyotard:

Wittgenstein's strength is that he did not opt for the positivism that was being developed by the Vienna Circle, but outlined in his investigation of language games a kind of legitimation not based on performativity. That is what the postmodern world is all about. Most people have lost the nostalgia for the lost narrative. It in no way follows that they are reduced to barbarity. What saves them from it is their knowledge that legitimation can only spring from their own linguistic practice and communicational interaction. ((PMC: 41)

Defining Wittgenstein's theory of the 'language games',⁷ Lyotard explains:

Each of the various categories of utterance can be defined in terms of rules specifying their properties and the uses to which they can be put – in exactly the same way as the game of chess is defined by a set of rules determining the properties of each of the pieces, in other words, the proper way to move them. It is useful to make the following three observations about language games. The first is that their rules do not carry within themselves their own legitimation, but are the object of a contract, explicit or not, between players (which is not to

⁶ Notably, in his 'Lyotard and Weber: Postmodern Rules and Neo-Kantian Values'(1990) in Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity, Bryan S. Turner (ed.), (London: Sage,1990), p. 108, Charles Turner differentiates between Lyotard's and Max Weber's accounts of modernity and postmodernity in terms of their respective emphases on culture's Wittgensteinian 'language games' and its 'neo-Kantian value spheres'.

⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations (1953), p. 23.

say that the players invent the rules). The second is that if there are no rules there is no game, that even an infinitesimal modification of one rule alters the nature of the game, that a "move" or utterance that does not satisfy the rules does not belong to the game they define. The third remark is suggested by what has just been said: every utterance should be thought of as a "move" in a game. (PMC:10)

According to these observations, each linguistic practice, or rather; each social interaction that necessarily takes place in the form of a language, is governed and ultimately defined by the contract between its participants for the rules of the language game they play, with each utterance or with each 'move'.⁸ These rules are thus not only 'heteromorphous' among themselves as such, but also with regard to the different games they comprise, defining in this way the 'nature of the social bond' in society as a whole. Lyotard suggests:

There is no need to resort to some fiction of social origins to establish that language games are the minimum relation required for society to exist: even before he is born, if only by virtue of the name he is given, the human child is already positioned as the referent in the story recounted by those around him, in relation to which he will inevitably chart his course. Or more simply still, the question of the social bond, insofar as it is a question, is itself a language game, the game of inquiry. It immediately positions the person who asks, as well as the addressee and the referent asked about: it is already the social bond. (PMC:15)

What this paradoxical and heterogeneous nature of the language-games ultimately culminates within postmodernity, Lyotard seems to imply, is a discourse of destabilization toward conventional forms of continuity (permanence and certainty) that claim validity outside the temporal rules of their local determinisms. At the same time, it indicates a discourse of legitimation that is primarily dependent on recognizing the contingency limits that envelop any statement's claims to historicity (universality and inevitability).

⁸ James Williams observes as much in his book *Lyotard: Towards a Postmodern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 28, when he notes that 'in The Postmodern Condition, it is impossible to reconcile two different language games in such a way as to do justice to both; Lyotard calls this the incommensurability of language games. When incommensurable language games come into dispute over a given case, he says there is a differend, an irresolvable conflict between them. The main point to retain about differends is that they cannot be resolved in fairness to both games involved. This incommensurability becomes apparent to us through a feeling, the feeling, of the sublime'.

This is, in fact, what gives rise to the postmodern sentiment of the 'sublime'. If the bond that determines the nature of the social is as incommensurable as Lyotard argues, then what was previously seen as true or even faintly permanent is now ponderable only in terms of the uncertain and the temporal. The limitlessness of what is questionable, thus, becomes both a philosophical inevitability and a constant perceptual drive for realization. Hence, an evocation of 'the conceivable that cannot be presented' (PMC:81); the 'unpresentable' that cannot be seen but can nevertheless be conceived of, or, in Lyotard's version, the 'sublime'. Even science, for Lyotard, is no longer capable of endowing unity to the language games. Rather, it has become, itself, a language game. Incapable of legitimating its own discourse by virtue of any outside 'universal metalanguage' (PMC:41) science is itself confined to the limits of its own linguistic 'moves':

Science plays its own game; it is incapable of legitimating the other language games. The game of prescription, for example, escapes it. But, above all, it is incapable of legitimating itself, as speculation assumed it could. ((PMC:40) It is changing the meaning of the word *knowledge*, while expressing how such a change can take place... And it suggests a model of legitimation that has nothing to do with maximized performance, but has as its basis **difference** understood as **paralogy**. (PMC:60) (My Bolds)

The idea of the legitimating differentiability of the language games in their ultimate plurality and temporality, here applied to scientific knowledge and extending to postmodern knowledge at large, has in its fulcrum, as Lyotard helpfully observes, a definition for *innovation* that is fundamentally different. Rather than as part of a system that seeks optimization of its results in accordance with the dynamics of a presumed homogeneity; *hence an invention*, innovation is defined as a **difference** made by the social acts of language in the rules of engagement for a chosen game. That is, a new 'move' in a language-game that attempts to delegitimize that game while seeking legitimation by it, both at the same time, asserting difference while altering the rules upon which it could be perceived as different. Hence, its newness is not constructivist; binary, but incommensurable; **differential**. It becomes, rather, a **paralogy**, which implies both its complex distinctiveness from, and continuity with, its language-game simultaneously. As such, paralogy defines and explains the typical cultural mentality of the language poem, which, as I have attempted to indicate before (p. 69), similarly makes its point by defying and attempting to change the very rules of signification upon which understanding and, therefore, legitimation of its aesthetic and cultural proposals depends. Lyotard notes:

Paralogy must be distinguished from innovation: the latter is under the command of the system, or at least used by it to improve its efficiency; the former is a move (the importance of which is often not recognized until later) played in the pragmatics of knowledge. (PMC:61)

However, the question still persists as to the meaning of such differentiability. What, in the name of the language games, does this rejection of previous unifying and homogenizing structures and methodologies, that Lyotard calls 'terror', ultimately signify? Firstly, it means that, at least for Lyotard, the postmodern sensibility is acutely aware of the cultural and intellectual limitations of previous paradigms and attempts to avoid replacing them with new ones by including them in its own discourses while suspending their claims to permanence and inevitability. It does not negate them entirely, but conditions their extremity by reducing their traditionally accepted *noise* or 'metanarratives', not by creating *louder noises*, or new 'metalanguages' (PMC:41), but by creating *louder silences*, new questions, new paradoxes and new irresolvable discrepancies or 'differends'.⁹

Secondly, it signifies that postmodernity's processes of legitimating itself; its knowledge, its art and its ethics, are strongly related to a deep desire for an almost absolute, unrepresentable, or sublime, sense of justice which it predictably contrasts to modernism's principles of consensus. For Lyotard:

Consensus has become an outmoded and suspect value. But justice as a value is neither outmoded nor suspect. We must thus arrive at an idea and practice of justice that is not linked to that of consensus. A recognition of the heteromorphous nature of language games is a first step in that direction. This obviously implies a renunciation of terror, which assumes that they are isomorphic and tries to make them so. The second step is the principle that any consensus on the rules defining a game and the "moves" playable within it *must* be local, in other words, agreed upon by its present players and subject to eventual cancellation. The orientation then favours a multiplicity of finite meta-arguments, by which I mean argumentation that concerns metaprescriptives and is limited in space and time. (PMC:66)

⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, The Differend: Phrases In Dispute, George Van Den Abeele (trans.), (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 81.

Thirdly, it signifies that language is the domain in which postmodernity identifies both its own legitimacy and the limitations of its predecessors; both the aptitude of its own uncertainties and the attitude of previous certainties. Language is itself the game, mostly played in postmodernity's delegitimation language-game.

As we have seen in the last two chapters, Hejinian's and Bernstein's general poetics offer precisely those areas of aesthetic and cultural emphasis. Firstly, their work respectively interrogates conventional poetic confessionality and the narrow uses of linguistic reference in contemporary language generally, and in other key experimental and conventional poetics such as that of Burroughs, Ashbery and Lowell specifically. However, their works' experimental distinctiveness does not attempt to negate these conventional qualities and concepts altogether as some critics have concluded,¹⁰ but rather to tone down their extremist claims for intrinsic cognitive value by including more complex variants of their usefulness. Hejinian, for example, argues:

What's more interesting to me than the concept of this ineffable "self" is the concept of the person, which has to do with activities, our daily and nightly being in the world. The person exists in context - or in an array of contexts enabling and / or requiring us to make choices, act on intentions, make the decisions which move us through life. To that extent, a person is self-creating, a construct or a construction, while at the same time, being that which does the constructing.¹¹

These poets' subsequent reliance on *implicit coherence* as a general philosophy of signification, involving a redefinition of the cultural and aesthetic function of the poetic form, further consolidates both their distinctiveness from, and continuity with, such innovative postmodern poetics as that of Gomringer, Lax and Cage. They are, indeed, acutely aware of the limitations of previous poetic paradigms, both conventional and experimental, interrogating these paradigms' hints of unsubstantiated consistency and explicit coherence by use of their own emphasis on substantiated inconsistency and *implicit coherence*.

Secondly, the motive behind much of their sophisticated poetic practices and ideals offers itself almost entirely as a search for a kind of poetic form or a language that would be sensitive enough, or just, to the ways in which

¹⁰ See p. 52 (paragraph 1) of the last chapter.

¹¹ Lyn Hejinian, Interviewed by Larry McCaffery and Brian McHale (1996), p. 130.

they conceive of the linguistic nature of our experiences in, and of, the world. This is the general nature of their politics; a search for linguistic justice, so to speak, which itself, as we shall see, includes their awareness of the impossibility of perfect representation and consequently effects the aesthetic sentiment of the sublime. For them, language does not simply *accompany* experience, but is itself the medium; the maker and the substance of such experience, comprising both the field of vision and the nature of the reflection at the same time.

What this means, however, in terms of cultural legitimacy, is that Lyotard's conclusions about the status of knowledge in late capitalism and his emphasis on the legitimating power inherent in the very differentiability principles of postmodernity's language-games, anticipate and qualify these poets' basic concerns with language, consciousness and reality as an understanding of the linguistic nature of the social bond and its necessarily heteromorphous manifestations. It is in this particular light, that their rhetorical critique of reference and their complex concept of self offer themselves. That is, they offer themselves, among other, equally complex, qualities and characteristics, as a different 'move' in the language-game of poetics; one which attempts to change the rules of that game by emphasizing its own differential nature.

Such a move, as Lyotard himself observes, will be 'denied the minimum consensus precisely because it changes the rules of the game upon which consensus had been based' (PMC:63).¹² Hence, as we have seen, its debasement as an 'inappropriate' practice in political ideology.¹³ It is not an 'invention' which follows the laws of its system and works for the maximization of its performance, but a 'paralogy' that offers differential laws on which it bases both its resistance and its legitimacy in the practice of the language it knows comprises the main playground for all other games. And as Lyotard himself acknowledges; 'the question of postmodernity is, first of all, a question of expressions of thought: in art, literature, philosophy, politics'.¹⁴ But, mostly, as he suggests:

¹² Significantly, other avant-garde poets, such as William Burroughs, view the capacities of a page-based experimental poetics for challenging the legitimacy of prevailing cultural values as inherently limited. In his The Job, interview with Daniel Odier (London: Jonathon Cape, 1969), p. 13, Burroughs argues:

You can do all sorts of things on type-recorders which cannot be done anywhere else – effects of simultaneity, echoes, speed-ups, slow-downs, playing three traces at once ... that cannot possibly be indicated on a printed page ... We are used to reading from left to right and then back, this conditioning is not easy to break down.

This is, of course, also debatable, since in practice, all artistic materials have their own inherent limitations.

¹³ See pp. 52-53.

¹⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, 'Notes on the Meaning of Post-' in Postmodernism: A Reader, Thomas Docherty (ed.), (New York & London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 49.

Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy. (PMC, Intro:25)

To be sure, like Lyotard's concept of 'paralogy', Hejiniian's and Bernstein's general cultural and aesthetic ideals and practices are marked by a strong incredulity toward homogenizing and unifying schemes, what Lyotard calls 'grand-narratives' (PMC:15). They challenge definitive distinctions between poetry and theory, politics and poetics, aesthetic value and social value, language and thinking, reference and gesture, writing and the world, and their work prides itself, as it were, for its blurred collective identity and its complex distinctiveness; for its relative textual openness and surface contradictions. And, again, as Lyotard points out:

The function of the **differential**, or imaginative or **paralogical** activity of the current pragmatics of science is to point out these metaprescriptives (science's "presuppositions") and to petition the players to accept different ones. The only legitimation that can make this kind of request admissible is that it will generate ideas, in other words, new statements. (PMC:65)

(My bolds)

Significantly, Perloff's more recent article 'After Language Poetry: Innovation and its Theoretical Discontents' (1999), views these poets' cultural and aesthetic proposals from the beginning of their careers in the 1970s as having 'less to do with innovation per se than with the conviction, on the part of a group of poets, themselves keenly interested in philosophy and poststructuralist theory, that poetics was an intellectual enterprise, deserving a larger place than it had in the Creative Writing classroom of the seventies'.¹⁵ In short, these poets' general differential proposals and practices define themselves both as a hypothetical delegitimation of other conventional and non-conventional poetics, or the existing game of poetics, and simultaneously, as a hypothetical legitimation of their own poetics. Yet, by attempting to delegitimize the very cultural language-game to which they should belong, they concomitantly delegitimize the possibility of their reception as legitimate parts of that game. Their work is, therefore, a paralogy; both inside and outside its kind of discourse, involved and not involved in its own general kind of game concomitantly.

¹⁵ Marjorie Perloff, 'After Language Poetry: Innovation and its Theoretical Discontents' (1999), Internet version: http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/perloff/after_langpo.html.

However, there is another, perhaps more basic, level of differentiability that cannot be explained by paralogy alone. It involves these poets' *abstract* resistance to poetic commercialization. As Lyotard observes in his interview with Gary A. Olson (1995) and, I suspect, many Language poets would principally agree:

Writing is the capacity to resist the network of exchanges in which cultural objects are commodities, and maybe to write is precisely to avoid making a book (or even a small paper or article) a commodity, but rather to oppose, to resist the simple and naïve exchangeability of things in our world.¹⁶

But also, as Lyotard has later observed about the effects of capitalism on the avant-gardes' aesthetic and cultural investigations in his article 'the Sublime and the Avant-Garde' (1984):

One has to concede that the art market, subject as are all markets to the sovereignty of the new, can exert a kind of seduction for artists. The attraction has to do with more than just corruption. It exerts itself within the boundaries of a confusion between innovation and the *Ereignis* that time itself imposes on contemporary capitalism... It is easy for the public and for artists, advised by intermediaries – the diffusers of cultural merchandise – to draw from this observation the notion that a work of art is avant-garde in direct proportion to the extent to which it is stripped off meaning... Just as with any novelty, it is necessary that the absurdity of the work not discourage buyers.¹⁷

This basic level of differentiability between the practices and the ideals of these poets is better understood *in conjunction* with this chapter's redefinition of Hutcheon's concept of 'contradiction' (POP:1) in terms of the *multiple* rather than the binary. In this sense, a combination between Lyotard's concept of the 'sublime' and 'paralogy', Hutcheon's concepts of 'irony' (*deep parody* in our coming redefinition) and 'contradiction', in addition to our previously defined concept of *implicit coherence*, will provide sufficient room for discussing the aesthetic and cultural poetics of these poets both generally and particularly in terms of their respective textual concepts and mechanisms.

¹⁶ Jean-François Lyotard, Interviewed by Gary A. Olson, 'Resisting a Discourse of Mastery: A Conversation with Jean-François Lyotard' in *Women Writing Culture*, Gary A. Olson and Elizabeth Hirsh (eds.), (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 173.

¹⁷ Jean-François Lyotard, 'The Sublime and The Avant-garde', *ARTEFORM*, Vol. XXII, no. 8 (April, 1984), pp. 36-43.

2. The Aesthetic of the Sublime:

If, for Lyotard, there can be no 'compossibility'¹⁸ between the language games; no dialectics that effects their integration into one universal measure of legitimation, or, in his words, 'no general metalanguage in which all other languages can be transcribed and evaluated' (64), there can also be no stable or given reality, or as Lyotard himself puts it, no 'objective reality' (73). In fact, 'modernity', for Lyotard, 'in whatever age it appears', the modern or the postmodern, 'cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without the discovery of the "lack of reality" of reality, together with the invention of other realities' (PMC:77). 'Reality', has become 'so destabilized that it offers no occasion for experience, but one for ratings and experimentation' (74). Even 'science and industry', in Lyotard's view, are 'no more free of the suspicion which concerns reality than art and writing' (76). Since, for Lyotard 'no industry is possible without a suspicion of the Aristotelian theory of motion, no industry without a refutation of corporatism, of mercantilism, and of physiocracy' (PMC:77).

On the other hand, 'realism', Lyotard argues, 'whose only definition is that it intends to avoid the question of reality implicated in that of art, always stands somewhere between academism and Kitsch' (75). Underlying its demands for an 'objective reality', Lyotard observes 'is an identical call for order, a desire for unity, for identity, for security, or popularity' (73):

Industrial photography and cinema will be superior to painting and the novel whenever the objective is to stabilize the referent, to arrange it according to a point of view which endows it with a recognizable meaning, to reproduce the syntax and vocabulary which enable the addressee to decipher images and sequences quickly, and so to arrive easily at the consciousness of his own identity as well as the approval which he thereby receives from others – since such structures of images and sequences constitute a communication code among all of them. This is the way the effects of reality, or if one prefers, the fantasies of realism, multiply. (PMC:74)

For Lyotard, 'if freed from a narrowly historicized interpretation' (77), this 'lack of reality' signifies a sentiment that lies at the heart of postmodernity's 'incredulity' (Intro., 24), which he identifies as 'the sentiment of the

¹⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, The Differend (1988), p. 81.

sublime' (PMC:79). In Lyotard's view, 'modern art' at large, be it in modernism or in postmodernism, finds 'its impetus', and 'the logic of the avant-garde' finds 'its axioms', 'in the aesthetic of the sublime' (77). As Lyotard notes, 'the sublime sentiment', which is also 'the sentiment of the sublime', is 'a strong equivocal emotion' that carries within it both pleasure and pain, or better still, in it 'pleasure derives from pain' (77). It develops as a 'conflict between the faculties of a subject, the faculty to conceive of something and the faculty to present something' (78) and, as such, takes place only 'when the imagination fails to present an object which might, if only in principle, come to match a concept' (PMC:78):

We have the Idea of the world (the totality of what is), but we do not have the capacity to show an example of it...We can conceive the infinitely great, the infinitely powerful, but every presentation of an object destined to "make visible" this absolute greatness or power appears to us painfully inadequate. Those are Ideas of which no presentation is possible. Therefore, they impart no knowledge about reality (experience); they also prevent the free union of the faculties, which gives rise to the sentiment of the beautiful; and they prevent the formation and the stabilization of taste. They can be said to be unrepresentable. (PMC:78)

In this way, for Lyotard, the conflicting powers of the faculties,¹⁹ which give rise to the sentiment of the sublime work to effect the sublime feeling of conceptual pleasure from conceptual pain. They are, in Lyotard's terms, an 'outburst' of 'imaginative and rational thought' (LAS:55), both remarkable in their respective strengths. On the one hand, the 'faculty of presentation' is the profound yearning 'for presence' felt by the human being; the 'obscure and futile will which inhabits him in spite of everything' (PMC:79). It is also, 'the powerlessness' (LAS:52) to present the 'unrepresentable' (PMC:79), since 'it is not the business of our understanding whether or not human sensibility or imagination can match what it conceives' (PMC:80). On the other hand, the 'faculty to conceive' is but the powerfulness and 'inhumanity' (PMC:79) of perception, and the drive toward 'excessiveness' (LAS:55) felt by thought to act for the conception of the 'absolute' (LAS:72, 123-4). Both faculties, as Lyotard himself observes, 'do violence' to their own conditions as they search for the 'unrepresentable' (PMC:79) and strive to achieve the 'limitless' (LAS:55).

¹⁹ See note no. 5.

Here, then, Lyotard argues, lies an essential difference between the aesthetic of the sublime and that of the beautiful. In the aesthetic of the beautiful, nature 'speaks' to thinking in both 'form' and presentable 'magnitude'. Thus thinking takes 'nature' as a 'compatible' 'model' for 'reflective judgements' (LAS:2,160). Nature's wholeness, completion, or 'finality' (LAS:68), is compatible to the sentiment-of-the-beautiful's realization of 'freedom' and claim to 'the universal: immediate and disinterested' (LAS:160). In other words, whereas the 'sublime' 'denies the imagination the power of forms, and denies nature the power to immediately affect thinking with forms' (LAS:54), in the beautiful :

Compatibility (no more) is made possible between the Idea of nature as mechanism, subject to the legislation of understanding that constitutes experience (first Critique), and the Idea of nature as art that authorizes and even calls for, as its end, as its horizon, the supernatural works of freedom. This compatibility is announced subjectively, minimally, so to speak, in the simple pleasure of the beautiful. (LAS:52)

As such, 'taste', or in Lyotard's terms the 'judgement of the beautiful' (LAS:58), differs from the sentiment of the sublime in terms of its effects on thinking, its internal mechanisms and the faculties used by it to signal its presence. Firstly, whereas the sentiment of the beautiful effects 'pure pleasure' (LAS:20) by means of solace, union and harmony, the 'sublime' sentiment occurs in the 'intrinsic combination' (PMC:81) of both 'happiness and unhappiness' (LAS:55), 'pleasure and pain': 'the pleasure that reason should exceed all presentation, the pain that imagination or sensibility should not be equal to the concept' (PMC:81).

Secondly, while the sentiment of the beautiful, 'is induced', in Lyotard's terms, 'by the form of the object' (LAS:58) since its 'finality' (LAS:68) appeals to 'a principle of universal consensus, which may never be attained' (PMC:77), the sentiment of the 'sublime' refers, by contrast, to what Lyotard calls 'the without-form' (LAS:58) and is induced instead by 'the absolute' (LAS:72,123-4), the 'limitless' (LAS:24-55), or the 'unpresentable' (PMC:79). As such, the sentiment of the beautiful works by the undecidable agreement, or in Lyotard's terms the 'engagement' (LAS:20) of the two faculties, the faculty to conceive and the faculty to present, while the 'sublime' sentiment works only when there is an unbridgeable void between them.

Finally, while the sentiment of the 'sublime' is affiliated with 'reason', that of the beautiful is affiliated with 'understanding'. Lyotard observes:

Because the feeling of the beautiful results from a form, which is a limitation, its affinity lies with understanding. The affinity of sublime feeling, which is or can be provided by the without form, lies with reason... Thus we see that the difference between the sublime and the beautiful is not one of emphasis. It is a transcendental difference. The "transition" from one to the other signifies to imagination that its "faculty" partner will change. (LAS:58-60).

3. The Postmodern Sublime:

If, modernity, for Lyotard, 'in whatever age it appears' (PMC:77), the modern or the postmodern, takes place in 'the withdrawal of the real and according to the sublime relation between the presentable and the conceivable' (PMC:79), it is possible within this framework to distinguish between two types of the sublime: the modern and the postmodern. According to Lyotard, 'modern aesthetics' though it is generally 'an aesthetic of the sublime' does not represent 'the real sublime sentiment' and, therefore, could only be considered a sort of aberration of it. Lyotard explains:

Modern aesthetics is an aesthetic of the sublime, though a nostalgic one. It allows the unrepresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents; but the form, because of its recognizable consistency, continues to offer to the reader or viewer matter for solace and pleasure. Yet these sentiments do not constitute the real sublime sentiment, which is in an intrinsic combination of pleasure and pain. (PMC:81)

Insofar as it 'desires' a form, modern aesthetics, for Lyotard, is a kind of pseudo-sublime sentiment. It offers a 'recognizable consistency' that eventually allows the reader 'the solace' of identifying with a collectivity that seeks materialization, thereby allowing the imagination, or the faculty of presentation a sort of orientation as to the limits of that form, hence offering empathy and equilibrium. The postmodern sublime, Lyotard argues, differs from this:

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. (PMC:81)

Thus, as we shall see in the following parts, the postmodern sublime of Bernstein and Hejinian uses its presentation not in order to refer to a definite possibility for the unity of the lacks, but to attempt the impossibility of presentation itself and, thereby, the pain of the imagination's failure to present and the pleasure of its conception achieving the concept. Better still, it attempts the unhappiness of its reason failing to mediate conception into a definite form and the happiness of its imagination presenting in presentation itself that which it seeks to surpass infinitely. Lyotard argues:

In the sublime, on the contrary, form plays no role at all. In fact, form conflicts with the purity of sublime delight. If one is still permitted to speak of "nature" in this feeling, one can speak only in terms of a "rude nature", "merely as involving magnitude". This magnitude is rude and arouses sublime feeling precisely because it escapes form, because it is completely "wanting in form or figure". (LAS:78)

The sublime presentation will, of course, as Lyotard himself reminds us, 'present something', though 'negatively': 'It will be white, like one of Malevitch's squares; it will enable us to see, only by making it impossible to see; it will please only by causing pain' (PMC: 78). As such, for Lyotard, there are two possible indexes for presenting the unrepresentable; 'formlessness', or the 'without-form' (LAS:58), and 'empty abstraction'. Lyotard argues:

But how to make visible that there is something which cannot be seen? Kant himself shows the way when he names "formlessness, the absence of form" as a possible index to the unrepresentable. He also says of the empty "abstraction" which the imagination experiences when in search for a presentation of the infinite (another unrepresentable): this abstraction itself is like a presentation of the infinite, its "negative presentation". (PMC:78)

It is thus the notion of what could perhaps be termed generally as the poetics of the 'infinite form' that hints, and only ever hints, to the presence of the unrepresentable as presentation itself and, thereby, define the postmodern sublime for Lyotard. However, as we shall also see, Hejinian and Bernstein offer distinctive signatures to their similarly 'sublime' aesthetics. Bernstein's is most often a playful 'sublime', superficially comic but sharply challenging, while Hejinian's is more contemplative, sombre, less comic, but tranquilly compelling, even piercing in its contextual suggestiveness.

4. Contradiction:

Generally speaking, if Lyotard's concepts of 'paralogy' and the 'sublime' describe postmodern *sensibility* in terms of its ontological and philosophical equations and attempt to analyse its *internal* processes of legitimation, Hutcheon's concepts of 'Irony' and 'contradiction' describe its *behaviour* or *temper* and attempt to analyse the *external* or phenomenological manifestations of its mentality. As such, while Hutcheon's discussion of the postmodern largely concentrates on the 'well known' novels which 'lay claim to historical events and personages' (POP:5) such as Umberto Eco's The Name of the Rose (1983), Findaly Timothy's Famous Last Words (1981) and Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children (1981), her concepts of 'contradiction' and 'irony' also usefully define significant aspects of postmodern creativity at large.

For Hutcheon, then, 'Postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges' (POP:1). As the lines below indicate, Hutcheon emphasizes, perhaps over emphasizes, her concept of the contradictory register of postmodern paradoxical mentality in many of her writings:

I will argue throughout this study that postmodernism is a fundamentally contradictory enterprise: its art forms (and its theory) at once use and abuse, install and then destabilize convention in parodic ways, self-consciously pointing both to their own inherent paradoxes and provisionality and, of course, to their critical or ironic re-reading of the art of the past. (POP:23)

Postmodernism's distinctive character lies in this kind of wholesale 'nudging' commitment to doubleness, or duplicity. In many ways it is an even-handed process because postmodernism ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge. (PPM:1-2)

What I want to call postmodernism is fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical and inescapably political.²⁰

²⁰ Linda Hutcheon, 'Theorizing the Postmodern' in The Post-Modern Reader, Charles Jencks (ed.), (London & New York: Academy Editions, 1992), p. 76.

As such, Hutcheon's concept of 'contradiction' appears, at least initially, based on almost dogmatic distinctions between seemingly stable oppositional cultural or subjective states of consciousness. In Hutcheon's view, postmodernism is 'contradictory' insofar as it is a 'doubleness or duplicity' (PPM:1) (POP:223), or insofar as it is 'even-handed' (PPM:1), 'uses' and 'abuses', 'installs' and then 'destabilizes', or 'installs and re-enforces' then 'undermines and subverts'. Clearly, the pluralistic sensibilities of contemporary culture, both in art and theory, are more complex than that. For example, according to Hutcheon's argument, the postmodern functions 'from within conventions in order to subvert them' (POP:5) whereby it asserts 'difference', rather than 'otherness' while resisting involvement in a 'homogeneous identity' (POP:6). 'The single concept of "otherness"', she argues, 'has associations of binarity, hierarchy, and supplementarity that postmodern theory and practice seem to want to reject in favour of a more plural and deprivileging concept of difference and the ex-centric' (POP:65).

However, many postmodern artistic forms also attempt to assert 'otherness' within its own particular forms of multi-dialectical 'difference'. Take, for example, the Scottish multi-media artist and poet / Concrete poet Ian Hamilton Finlay.²¹ His recurrent emphasis on what he sees as the classical values of 'harmony', 'order' and 'purity' in terms of both their aesthetic and political structures is both reaffirmed and simultaneously questioned by the poetics of his work. Declaring that he does not belong to this age altogether,²² he associates himself, and the values he explores in his work, with the classical mythological eras of the Greeks. Yet, his juxtapositions of various architectural and poetic materials and formats (e.g. his poetic installations at the Max Planck Institute in Germany (1976) and his collection inside 'The Garden Temple' (1970s) in his farm house in Lanark, Scotland) exhibit the very spirit of experimental multi-media compositions that largely informs contemporary artistic practices.

²¹ For a general outlook on Finlay's artistic and poetic career including his poetic installations in the Max Planck Institute in Germany and in his own Garden, see both; Yves Abrioux, Ian Hamilton Finlay: A Visual Premier (London: Reaktion Books, 1992), and Herausgegeben Von Rosemarie E. Pahlke's, & Pia Simig's (eds), Ian Hamilton Finlay (Germany: Cantz, 1996). For a more detailed examination of Finlay's aesthetic see both; Alec Finlay (ed), Wood Notes Wild (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1995) as well as the author's previous thesis entitled Ian Hamilton Finlay and the Post-modern Impulse, De Montfort University Postgraduate Library, the Gateway, Leicester, LE1 9BH, U. K.

²² Ian Hamilton Finlay, Interviewed by Nicholas Zurbrugg, Art & Design, Profile no: 45 (1995), p. 51.

In this sense, Finlay's work, as Bernstein's and Hejninian's, integrates both 'otherness' and 'difference'. On the one hand, it rejects what Finlay himself calls 'the total secularization of our culture'²³ by its direct appeal to mythological and historical figures and values whereby asserting 'otherness' from the increasingly materialistic and commercial values of contemporary life. Secondly, within this very spirit of 'otherness', Finlay's work offers its particular kind of 'difference' insofar as it employs, in a unique way, the very methods of across-media juxtaposition characterizing the materialistic sensibilities that it abstractedly rejects.

Hutcheon's concept of postmodern contradictory or paradoxical sensibilities is itself then double sided, insofar as it is structured in a way that under-estimates the complexity and multiplicity of the postmodern it seems to want to assert. Yet, it generally hints, by association and implicit suggestion, to an equally useful phenomenological direction towards which a more practical concept of this contradictory tendency in postmodernism can be explored, particularly in the context of the above re-definition of that concept as *complex multiplicity* rather than *doubleness*. It seems only prudent, in this sense, to examine the more tentative specifics of this concept in Hutcheon's argument. These include two principal and complementary aspects. The first concerns postmodernism's *multi-dimensional* resistance to conventional concepts of 'centres'; what Hutcheon calls the postmodern 'ex-centric' (POP:57). The second concerns its contesting of conventional concepts of 'the unified coherent subject' (POP:12) in favour of what Hutcheon terms 'the enunciating subject' (POP:74).

4.a. The 'Ex-Centric', and the Anti-Whole:

One of the most apparent manifestations of the particular sensibilities of postmodern mentality is defined, in our re-reading of Hutcheon's concept of 'contradiction', by its rejection of conventional concepts of centres; the focal points of origins, of emergence and of return. Hutcheon argues:

When the centre starts to give way to the margins, when totalizing universalization begins to self-deconstruct, the complexity of the contradictions within conventions – such as those of genre, for instance – begin to be apparent... the image of the labyrinth without centre or periphery might replace the conventionally ordered notion we usually have of a library... But

²³ Ian Hamilton Finlay, Interviewed by Paul Crowther, 'Classicism, Piety and Nature', *Art & Design*, profile no: 36 (1994), p. 88.

the power of these new expressions is always paradoxically derived from that which they challenge. (POP:59)

As I have attempted to indicate earlier, both the positions of the challenged and the challenger seem equally blurred in postmodernity's incredulity toward the stable models of thought like the binary and the oppositional. Hutcheon herself observes that this 'ex-centricity' is neither an 'absolutist' (POP:55) uncertainty nor an indefinite 'suspension of judgement'. But rather, as she also argues, 'it questions the very basis of any certainty (history, subjectivity, reference) and of any standard of judgement. Who sets them? When? Where? Why?' (POP:57):

If the centre is seen as a construct, a fiction, not a fixed and unchangeable reality, the "old either – or begins to break down"... and the new and – also of multiplicity and difference opens up new possibilities. (POP:62)

In short, the 'ex-centricity' (POP:57) of postmodernity's typical cultural discourse reveals itself in three distinctively plural ways. In each way, Hutcheon's argument provides the starting point. Firstly, it resists conventional concepts of centres and wholes questioning hegemonic definitions of borderlines between categories of thought or genres of art as well as of singular historical points of origins and inscription. However, it acts in this way not in terms of the outside / inside, use / abuse, challenge / accommodation, centre / marginal, installation and subversion, dichotomies, but in terms of a firm supposition of the complexity of the aesthetic and the social.

Secondly, it does not attempt to re-instate permanent or definitive equilibriums within or between its component impulses; 'even-handedness' (PPM:1) in Hutcheon's argument. Rather, postmodern discourses tend to offer their own aesthetic disinterest in the idea of re-instating, or negating, the marginal / the centre. Meanwhile they exhibit their own ironic seriousness (or debatability) in diverse mixtures of philosophic and artistic negotiation / integration / blurriness between the perceived marginal and the perceived central. Finally, because of these traits, postmodern artistic explorations such as the work of Bernstein and Hejninian do not readily lend themselves to analysis based on structures of binary thought. The assumptions of stable value implicated in such structures, more often than not, gloss over the more subtle aspects of their poetics.

Many critics, for example, have attempted to define the political significance of these poets' work in terms of either anti- or pro-establishment rhetoric; an opposition of, or otherwise, an assimilation by, the academic canonization values and standards.²⁴ Thus, for McGann, their work is 'situated – economically and institutionally – outside the academy'.²⁵ Similarly, for Lazer, it is 'one of the first fundamentally different poetries to challenge New Critical paradigms from within an institutional framework'.²⁶ Equally, for Golding, it offers 'another example of poets critiquing and attempting to reshape canons through the mediating institution of the academy'.²⁷ By contrast, critics such as Joel Lewis, Walter Kalaidjian, Paul Quinn and Geoffrey Treacle consecutively suggest that the work of these poets has been assimilated as 'part of the very institution it opposes',²⁸ insofar as it is 'taken over' by the academy,²⁹ and its poets; 'The outsiders', in this perspective, 'have to some extent come inside',³⁰ and are 'thriving' these days 'in the academic and university publishing centres'.³¹ Edwin Morgan summarizes this approach by suggesting that 'it is, in essence, an ancient and recurring situation: as one set of outsiders is tamed and institutionalized, another set of outsiders is required to take the body politic and make people think again'.³²

²⁴ Alan Golding's *From Outlaw to Classic* (Wisconsin / London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), p. 144, for example, observes how 'the university has become the central (though not the only) canon-making institution in contemporary American poetry' arguing that:

This situation follows partly from the professionalization of poetry criticism ... and from the resulting split, represented in the establishment of creative writing programs, between poetry and criticism or theory. It is this split, and the related institutionalization of the univocal "workshop lyric" in university writing programs, university press poetry series, and classroom anthologies, that Language writing, the most visible and energetic avant-garde movement in the 1970s and 1980s, may be seen as addressing.

²⁵ Jerome McGann, 'Contemporary Poetry: Alternate Route' (1987), pp. 626-27.

²⁶ Hank Lazer, *Opposing Poetries: Volume One. Issues and Institutions* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1996), p. 146.

²⁷ Alan Golding, *From Outlaw To Classic* (1995), p. 144.

²⁸ Joel Lewis, 'Ink Mathematics: An Introduction to Language poetry' (1990), p. 24.

²⁹ Walter Kalaidjian, *American Culture Between the Wars* (1993), p. 189.

³⁰ Paul Quinn, 'Rattling the Chains of Free Verse', *Times Literary Supplement*, Friday April 30th, 1999, Internet version: <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/bernstein/joris.html>

³¹ Geoffrey Treacle, 'Language Review', *Chicago Review*, (Summer / Fall, 1999), p. 198.

³² Edwin Morgan, 'Language, Poetry, and Language Poetry', *Edinburgh Review*, no. 97 (Spring, 1997), pp. 150-64.

These poets' ideals and practices have not, therefore, been considered in terms of both their inseparable sides; their institutional and anti-institutional tendencies, their textual experimental difference and their centre-like canonization by, and involvement in, the institution. Their ideals and practices are, thus, *neither solely inside nor solely outside the perceived centres, being both inside and outside its own kind of discourse at the same time*. As Ron Silliman notes, in his article 'Canons and Institutions: New Hope for the Disappeared' (1990):

It is worth noting that our two primary goals, deconstructing public canonicity and rejoining theory to practice (and practice to theory), are themselves identifiable components of the programs of other tendencies within the academy.³³

Considered as an *outsider*, the work of these poets may seem indeed little more than an anti-establishment aesthetic tendency alignable with various previous avant-garde movements and tendencies. Like those tendencies, it appears to have started through its own alternative network of publication channels for limited editions chip-book series and desk-top publishing. Its initial politics appears to entertain 'leftist', or generally, 'rebellious' politics. Its textual experimentations seem to violate the known standards of academic poetic traditions such as the rule of genre, the hold of grammar and the narrative modalities of writing. All such aspects, if considered singularly, would situate their poetics closer to a definition of a 'revolutionary' aesthetics in the eyes of those who are still interested in the dialects of 'pro-' and 'anti-'.

Considered as an *insider*, however, there seems to be a different version of the story. On the one hand, these poets' attempts to gain an audience have, more or less, culminated in their following of the same marketing strategies in the promotion of their own publications, which they artificially resist. Commenting on the title of one of Silliman's articles 'the New Sentence' (1977) Perelman, for example, observes:

While the theory behind the name is meant to politicize literature, the name itself smacks of common marketing practices: "the new Dodge", "the new Coke", "the New Frontier", "the New Covenant"-almost any noun can serve... The new sentence is both a symptom of the age and a formal device that is highly motivated by literary historical concerns. (MOP:61)

³³ Ron Silliman, 'Canons and Institutions: New Hope for the Disappeared' in The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy, Charles Bernstein (ed.), (New York: Roof, 1990), p. 167.

On the other hand, they seem to utilize institutional frameworks to the full extent. Bernstein for instance, holds the David Gray Chair in the English department at the New York State University.³⁴ The hierarchical connotations implicit in the assumption of such a position alone would instantaneously provide enough ammunition to whatever argument that perceives postmodern discourse of this sort as a straight forward conservative alliance with power; a bourgeois discourse seeking fulfilment of its own self-attaining ambitions (e.g. Hartley, 1989:39, Morgan, 1997:150).

But as Hutcheon herself observes 'the theory and practice of postmodern arts have shown ways of making the different, the off-center, into the vehicle for aesthetic and even political consciousness – raising perhaps the first necessary step to any radical change' (POP:73).

4.b. The 'Enunciating Subject':

Just as much as the postmodern contradictory discourses reveal themselves partially in the 'ex-centric' or the 'off-centre', they also do in the notion of the 'enunciating subject' (75), which, for Hutcheon, replaces conventional concepts of the 'unified coherent subject' (POP:12). She explains:

In the context of humanism, the individual is unique and autonomous, yet also partakes of that general human essence, human nature. In a capitalist context ... the pretence of individualism (and thus of choice) is in fact proportional to the 'liquidation of the individual' in mass manipulation, carried out, of course, in the name of democratic ideals – the masks of conformity. If, as is frequently the case, postmodernism is identified with a 'decentering' of this particular notion of the individual, then both humanist and capitalist notions of selfhood or subjectivity will necessarily be called into question. (PPM:13)

Accordingly, Hutcheon seems to argue, postmodern temper primarily identifies its subject with the temporal limits of 'the enunciative act itself' whose social and political contexts comprise the provisional contours and

³⁴ For a brief biographical outlook on the careers of Bernstein and Hejinian see Appendix I, and for the main critical publications about their work see Appendix II.

the contingent conditions of that subject, with each utterance and with each enunciating performance. Hutcheon observes:

In emphasizing the receiver's role, postmodern works never, however, repress the process of production. The concept of the artist as unique and originating source of final and authoritative meaning may well be dead, as Barthes claimed... Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that this *position* of discursive authority still lives on, because it is encoded into the enunciative act itself. (POP:77)

What this means, however, for our own discussion of Hutcheon's concept of postmodern 'contradiction', is, in short, a double coded emphasis on both the subject's referential and gestural powers in language. Such emphasis works to underline this subject's abilities to re-construct and subvert givens and underpinnings both at the same time; to produce and reproduce in the very act of reception which itself becomes less and less detached from the act of production. The subject, in this perspective, has the ability to conceive of materiality and pure presence in the very moment of engaging abstractions and absences; to be both 'different' - which does not necessarily make her an 'other' yet, by our definition, also includes it- and 'social' which does not necessarily make her a particle in a generalized and a generalizing resemblance. Significantly, if freed from its own either / or dualities, Hutcheon's general definition of the postmodern, hints to precisely this sensibility:

Postmodernism is the *process* of making the *product*; it is *absence* within *presence*, it is *dispersal* that needs *centering* in order to *be* dispersal; it is the *ideolect* that wants to be, but knows it cannot be, the *master code*; it is *immanence* denying yet yearning for *transcendence*. In other words, the postmodern partakes of a logic of "both/and", not one of "either/or". (POP:49)

Hejinian's and Bernstein's concepts of the poetic self, and the ways in which they enact the paradox of individual distinctiveness within group affiliation offer precisely this type of paradoxical subjectivity. As I have indicated before, these poets share and simultaneously distinguish both their common political and aesthetic concepts and their individual or idiosyncratic interpretations of these concepts in their respective poetics; offering differential, rather than accumulative, or simply compositional, poetic identities. As the following parts will explain in detail, their respective textual mechanisms and techniques re-affirm this kind of explorative attention to the provisional parameters of their respective poetic selves in their writings. At least in one sense,

this seems to be the reason why many of the critics who have considered this issue have, more or less, confused one side of the equation for the other, discussing their poetry either as a definite group identifiable as such with every measure of identification available (e.g. Clark, 1987:300, Weinberger, 1996:83), or as entirely different and *dispersed* individuals who have too little of a commonality to warrant description of them under any specific identity (e.g. Messerli, 1987:2, Hartley, 1989:12). The work of these poets has not been considered as that which offers specifically this type of differential identity.

5. 'Parodic Irony', or *Deep Parody*?:

According to Hutcheon, the 'privileged mode' (POP:35) of postmodern paradoxical and 'ex-centric' subjectivity has come to be 'ironic parody' (POP:27), in which both the present and the past are paradoxically present. However, the postmodern variant of 'ironic parody', for Hutcheon, does not derive from 'ridiculing imitation'³⁵ as its dictionary definition suggests,³⁶ or 'empty pastiche', as Jameson argues (1991: 17-55). Rather Hutcheon suggests:

The collective weight of parodic *practice* suggests a redefinition of parody as repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity... To include irony and play is *never* necessarily to exclude seriousness and purpose in postmodernist art. (POP:26,7)

As such, 'parody', for Hutcheon, implies and intensifies the paradoxical and 'ex-centric' qualities of postmodern 'enunciative' subjectivity:

Parody has perhaps come to be a privileged mode of postmodern formal self-reflexivity because its paradoxical incorporation of the past into its very structures often points to these ideological contexts somewhat more obviously, more didactically, than other forms. Parody seems to offer a perspective on the present and the past which allows an artist to speak *to* a

³⁵ Linda Hutcheon, 'Theorizing the Postmodern' (1988), p. 83.

³⁶ For example, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 866, defines parody as 'a humorous exaggerated imitation of an author, or literary work', 'a feeble imitation' and 'a travesty'.

discourse from *within* it, but without being totally recuperated by it. Parody appears to have become, for this reason, the mode of what I have called the “ex-centric”. (POP:35)

Parody, in this perspective, is an ironic ‘revisitation of the past of both art and history’ (PPM:103-4); always a ‘critical re-working’; ‘critical revisiting’; a ‘rethinking’ (POP:4) and a ‘recontextualizing of the forms of the past’ (POP:29), rather than ‘a nostalgic return’ (POP:4) or an attempt of revival. Postmodern parody, Hutcheon implies, is primarily a critical revaluation of the objects of the past and a re-consideration of the settled ways of their representation in our memory. Hutcheon suggests:

Postmodern art ... uses parody and irony to engage the history of art and the memory of the viewer in a re-evaluation of aesthetic forms and contents through a reconsideration of their usually unacknowledged politics of representation. (PPM:100)

Here then, Hutcheon seems to argue, lies the difference between modern and postmodern parody. Where the former sought by its incorporation of the past an aesthetic completion, the latter’s use of parody contests the very notion of ever being able to know ‘the ultimate objects’ of the past, and therefore seeks to re-open rather than close or homogenize paradoxes and contradictions:

It is not that modernism was serious and significant and postmodernism is ironic and parodic, as some have claimed; it is more that postmodernism’s irony is one that rejects the resolving urge of modernism toward closure or at least distance. (PPM:99)

This seems to describe some of what is at stake in the poetics of Bernstein and Hejninian. A re-contextualization of the ways in which poetic perception interprets and re-presents the world both past and present, or in Hutcheon’s words, ‘a confrontation of the problem of the aesthetic to a world of significance external to itself’:

I want to argue that it is precisely parody – that seemingly introverted formalism – that paradoxically brings about a direct confrontation with the problem of the relation of the aesthetic to a world of significance external to itself, to a discursive world of socially defined meaning systems (past and present) – in other words, to the political and the historical. (POP:22)

However, between Hutcheon's concept of 'parody' (POP:35) and the kind of *parody* utilized in the respective writings of Hejinian and Bernstein, there is a principal difference. Hutcheon's concept of 'parody' defines itself primarily through the art-works' direct quotations from past artistic forms and vocabulary. Such quotations, for better or worse, are readily recognizable as such in our collective historical memory. They remain both visible and transparent in their respective re-evaluative contexts. Visible because of their direct reference to their original art works in what Hutcheon herself terms as 'ironic quotation', 'appropriation' or 'intertextuality' (PPM: 93). And transparent, because their point lies precisely in their abilities to *refer* to those works.

The kind of parodic irony employed in the work of such Language poets as Bernstein, Silliman and Hejinian differs from this insofar as its quotations from the past are those of language uses and phraseology, rather than of actual texts and phrases. Put another way, instead of actually incorporating specific quotations from past literary or artistic works, these poets cite such works' wider structural methods and modalities; their linguistic patternology, so to speak. Postmodern parody of this sort, this thesis suggests, is better termed as *deep parody* in order to distinguish it from Hutcheon's more explicit form of 'parody'. What I mean by *deep parody* will perhaps become apparent by briefly using four examples all together: three of Hutcheon's concept of 'parody', (two of hers and one of mine), and one more example of *deep parody* from the work of the Language poet Ron Silliman.

In her discussion of Peter Ackroyd's novel Chatterton, (1987), Hutcheon observes how the novel contrasts and parodies the official record of an 'eighteenth-century poet and forger' by the name of Thomas Chatterton, with a proposition of double-endedness. In the context of this novel, Hutcheon notes, Chatterton 'did not die' as stated in the record 'by suicide in 1770 at the age of 18 (thus becoming the stereotypical representation of the gifted and doomed youthful genius)', but his death was re-explained in apparently two distinctive and contrasting ways':

That he died, not by suicide, but from an accident produced by his inept and inexperienced self-medication for VD; and that he did not die at 18 at all, but faked his own death to avoid being exposed as a fraud and lived on to compose other great forgeries. (PPM:95-6)

Accordingly, this novel, for Hutcheon, contrasts and problematizes the relationship of the past and the present by means of re-presentation, or ironic re-contextualization. In its very first page, Hutcheon observes, the novel

gives 'the official historical record' (PPM:96) of Thomas Chatterton's life and death, so that there would be little doubt about its self-conscious re-qualification and paradoxical inclusion of that past into its new representation of it.

Another of Hutcheon's examples of this type of postmodern parodic irony is present in her discussion of Angela Carter's Nights at the Circus, (1984). This novel, and others of its kind, Hutcheon argues:

Similarly challenge the concealed or unacknowledged politics and evasions of aesthetic representation by using parody as a means to connect the present to the past without positing the transparency of representation, verbal or visual... A feminist parody of Leda and the Swan, the protagonist of Angel Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (known as Fevvers), becomes 'no longer an imagined fiction, but a plain fact' – 'the female paradigm', 'the pure child of the century that just now is waiting in the wings, the New Age in which no woman will be bound to the ground'. The novel's parodic echoes of *Pericles*, *Hamlet*, and *Gulliver's Travels*, all function as do those of Yeats's poetry when describing a whorehouse full of bizarre women as 'this lumber room of femininity, this rag-and-bone shop of the heart': they are all ironic feminization of traditional or canonic male representation of the so-called generic human – 'Man'. This is the kind of politics of representation that parody calls to our attention.

(PPM:98)

The work of the Scottish poet, sculptor-collaborator, landscape gardener and artist, Ian Hamilton Finlay offers another example of a parallel form of ironic parody. In his installation entitled 'the Garden Temple' (1970s), part of his famous grandeur poetic garden at his farmhouse 'Little Sparta', in Lanark, Scotland, references to classical architecture and mythology are both clearly stated, as representations of the past, and clearly re-contextualized and redefined in the general contours of his contemporary use of that past. Thus figures of the Greek mythological God Apollo, for example, are juxtaposed with, and re-defined by, images of contemporary military iconography such as missiles, or machine guns. Classical architecture such as columns and pillars are physically erected or artistically drawn in combination with contemporary materials and settings. Similarly, sculptures and figures of the French revolutionary Saint Just (1768-1794), are associated with, and re-contextualized by both the figure of the playful mythological God Apollo and the more contemporary reference to the need for justice and morality.

Deep parody differs from this, as the example below indicates, not so much in terms of its complex reference to the past, or in terms of its subsequent redefinition of it, but in terms of the scope of perspective it chooses to view that past from and the degree of dependency the work itself exhibits on its presence as an aesthetic effect. Insofar as deep parody in the work of Language poets such as Bernstein, Silliman and Hejinian, does not depend for its ironic reflection on citation from past historical texts, and, instead, ironically recites their patterns encoded in certain discursive sequences in language, or their language uses, both present and past, its scope of re-considering and re-defining that past is necessarily larger. In this sense, the adjective 'deep' in the phrase *deep parody* does not intend to imply a value-judgement, but to refer, almost programmatically, to *an abstractedly geographical locus*. Whereas Hutcheon's concept of 'parody' *locates* it on the surface of the work as explicit citation, on which the dialectics of the work's representational poetics *depend* to identify its aesthetic and ideological processes of contrasts and re-contextualization, our concept of *deep parody* *locates* it underneath the surface of the work by reference to methodological linguistic patterns and offers it as an *optional* level of ironic signification.

Deep parody's concern is, therefore, more contextual than textual and more with particles of the language than with their possible wholeness. As such, it reflects a post-Saussurean understanding of language as a multiplicity of co-existent incommensurable systems, or as levels of multiple co-structuralisms, dissecting each other on various planes of significance; the arbitrary and the intentional, the gestural and the referential, the social and the aesthetic, the political and the psychological, the synchronic and the diachronic simultaneously. Consider, for example, this short passage from Silliman's poem 'Tjanting' (1981) which typically utilizes its words, phrases and sentences not in their capacity to mean something external to themselves, but in their capacity to represent their own kinds of language uses and parodically reflect on them:

Not this.
 What then? I started over & over. Not this.
 Last week I wrote "the muscles in my palm so sore from halving the rump roast I cld barely grip the pen." What then? This morning my lip is blistered.
 Of about to within which. Again & again I began. The gray light of the day fills the yellow room in a way wch is somber. Not this. Hot grease had spilld on the stove top.
 Nor that either.³⁷

³⁷ Ron Silliman, *Tjanting* (Berkeley, CA: The Figures, 1981), p.11.

The section starts with a negation and a question: Not This / What then?, by which the reader is left wondering as to what the word 'this' in the negation, and the word 'what' in the question, refer to or ask about. So our reading habits entail; 'this' usually *refers* to something and 'what' usually *asks* about something, both of which should, in principle, be ascertainable. Then the sentence; 'I started over & over', follows to give but a glimpse as to the meaning of the word 'this' and the significance of the word 'what', but only to be frustrated and ironized by yet another negation; 'Not this'. As if to say that even the not knowing of what 'this', or 'what', in the first sentences refer to, or ask about, is itself not enough to represent the complexity inherent in the processes of signification. The sequence implies that even the admission of complexity is itself not sufficient to represent this very complexity. Starting 'over and over' will still, in the poem's eye, not be adequate to conjure adequate sensitivity to such complexity.

The poem, then, brings about another sequence. This time a longer one; 'Last week I wrote "the muscles in my palm so sore from halving the rump roast I cld barely grip the pen', implying that it attempts to do or utilize every sequence it can. The poem provides such sequence in perfectly related phrases only to frustrate it with yet another question; 'What then?', confirming the inability of this sort of discursive sequence to present the kind of meaning coherence and harmony it claims it could. In its questioning of the sequential relations that preceded it, the phrase 'What then?' parodies the ways in which their linguistic methodology of signification is usually accepted and often expected by readership as necessarily meaningful.

Again, the poem follows such breakages with another conventionally structured and clear sentence: 'This morning my lip is blistered', as though to emphasize by its obvious disjunction, this statement's parodic recitation of discursive habits of linguistic connections. It is as if the poem wants to indicate that in such a sophisticated and multi-layered processes of signification, we should not really care what happened to your 'lip' this morning. More significantly, it implies a dramatization of the inadequacy of conventional sequential relations to reflect the intrinsic complexity of linguistic meaning, thereby, parodying the 'usual' ways of projecting or enacting those processes in language. This is no more apparent in this section of the poem than in the phrase to follow: 'Of about to within which', which, more or less, summarizes the poem's *deep parodization* of normative language uses. 'Of about to within which' seems to represent an ironic emphasis on the failure of the conventional discursive sequitur to make true sense in the poem's eyes.

What follows only serves to confirm this realization of the poem. 'Again and again I began', it continues, in vain, it implies. The remainder of the poem follows, more or less, the same structural format: a citation of what the poem views as normative or conventional language use, followed by an ironic negation, then by a final *parodization* of these uses and their perceptual contexts. Thus, 'the gray light of the day fills the yellow room in a way wch is somber', representing the kind of discursive language uses that the poem critiques, is followed by the ironic repetitive negation; 'Not this'. In turn, this negation is followed by 'Hot grease had spilld on the stove top' whose apparent disjunction and playfulness *deeply parodies* both the negation and the normative language use by implying their failure to make sense in the poem's eyes. This is then followed by a final *deep parodization* in which the poem denies and re-affirms its problematic re-presentation and parodization of conventional language uses; 'Nor that either'.

Here, and elsewhere in the works of these poets, the past is cited, not in terms of its authors' texts, but rather, in terms of the linguistic structures through which such texts may take place. *Deep parody* in the poetics of such Language poets as Silliman's, Bernstein's and Hejinian's respective aesthetics, acts, though differently, to re-define and re-contextualize past and present language uses without resolving the inconsistencies implied by the presence of both the present and the past. Its objects of irony are thus neither transparent nor necessarily visible since the kind of discursive sequences such objects include are often themselves the linguistic *contexts* upon which other texts and utterances are based.

Because *deep parody* never functions on the surface by calling attention to past-authored contexts, events or explicit texts, it is inherently less visible than what Hutcheon's concept of 'parody' locates, but not less paradoxical or ironic. Superficially, it may appear as fragments of linguistic particles that are frustrating to follow and difficult to appreciate. With a deeper look, it is a world of complex signification continuously engaged in presenting and critiquing past and present perceptual patterns and sequences.

Part Two

Charles Bernstein &

'The Poetry of Mistakes'

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Chapter 4: | Mistakes of Visibility:
Paralogy and Contradiction or
The Contours of Bernstein's Self |
| Chapter 5: | Mistakes of Readability:
Bernstein's Development and Language |
| Chapter 6: | Mistakes of Sensibility:
Bernstein and The Postmodern Sublime |

*I make meaning of the failure to arrive, for
so often it is a breaking down of the chain of
sense that lets me find my way. Charles
Bernstein, 1999.¹*

¹Charles Bernstein, My Way: Speeches and Poems (1999), pp. 4-5.

The last part of this thesis has attempted to generally re-define the key textual and contextual characteristics of the poetics of Bernstein and Hejinian, describing, in the process, their main areas of overlap with the Language poetics at large. These include, in summary, their challenge to conventional poetic concepts and formats (especially pp. 15), their emphasis on language's formative relationship to thought and on its unconventional meaning processes (especially pp. 29, 55), their particular types of blending between genres and discourses (especially pp. 38-40), their paradoxical collective and individual identities (especially pp. 43-45), their adoption of contradiction and differentiability as general conceptual and aesthetic principles (especially pp. 43, 46-47, 59), their main philosophy of formal composition which involves a differential kind of fusion between the arbitrary and the deliberate (especially pp. 74, 77-79) and their emphasis on *implicit* rather than explicit *coherence* (especially pp. 80-81) as their main philosophy of poetic signification. Completing our proposed conceptual grammar (paralogy, the sublime, *deep parody*, contradiction), the last chapter has attempted to suggest how these and others of the more specific characteristics of the poetics of these poets can best be understood and defined. The following parts will, therefore, consecutively, attempt to define the specific signatures of the poetics of each of these two poets individually and comparatively. However, as the preface of this study has attempted to indicate (pp. 9-11), **our concern is mainly with prescribing a method of reading; making a claim for a strategy rather than for definitions in the traditional rhetorical way.**

In his latest public appearance in the UK, Charles Bernstein has emphasized his concern for what he calls 'a poetry of mistakes; a poetry of tripping'.² It is perhaps in these very terms that the paralogic, *deep parodic*, contradictory, *implicitly coherable* and sublime poetics of his work can best be identified. From a conventional point of view, discussing Bernstein's aesthetic in terms of 'mistakes' seems accurate insofar as it denotes some decidedly illegal textual and contextual manoeuvres in his work (grammatical and syntactic disorders are two very obvious examples) whose logic of movement and the factual realities they purport appear, from that point of view, ill-conceived, illogical or nonsensical.

From the more experimental, contemporary or postmodern perspective, the word 'mistakes' seems also accurate insofar as its *negative* connotations paradoxically help foreground the type of 'paralogy' Bernstein's poetics offers. That is, it highlights both the unconventionality of his work's resistance to conventional aesthetic and

² Charles Bernstein, a conversation with the author on the peripheries of the conference Language / poetry / Performance, De Montfort University, Leicester, England, Friday 8th, and Saturday December the 9th, 2000.

cultural value-systems and the meaning of his text's constant movements between different contextual and generic registers (the ironic, the ambiguous, the proverbial, the philosophical, the political, the prescriptive) in which such resistance often takes place.

And from a more critical point of view, this description seems equally telling insofar as it underlines some contextual misalignments between Bernstein's ideals and practices. For example, his theoretical emphasis on 'writing' as a process of 'letting it happen' (CD:41) is continually redefined by the exact paradoxicality of his textual designs. More specifically, his early rejection of 'orality' in poetry; what he called in 1979 'the theatricalization of poetry', as a way of 'reducing the body of the work to little more than personality' ('Stray Straws and Straw Men', CD:44), is modified by his late work's emphasis on performance and by his recent criticism of what he now calls the 'hierarchy' of the 'written word'.³

'Mistakes' in the context of Bernstein's poetics, thus, informs what this thesis has been describing, in Lyotard's terms, as 'paralogy' (PMC:60) and, in Hutcheon's, as 'contradiction' (POP:23). That is, the differential 'moves' of critiquing, and simultaneously appealing to, the established rules of the known socio-aesthetic cultural 'game' that characteristically offer *multiple* possibilities for tentative signification. In other words, these 'moves' are almost always offered in the distinctive *flexible* mechanisms of Bernstein's poetry (such as his texts' contrasting formal designs and multiplicity of reference and gesture) in order to modify both the game, from which they assert difference, and the rules upon which this difference could ordinarily be perceived.

'Mistakes' also informs what this thesis has been describing in its own terms as *implicit coherence* and *deep parody*. On the one hand, Bernstein's work always offers the possibility for coherent meanings, but suggests such possibility as an unnecessary quality to which his poems themselves seem oblivious. On the other hand, his work employs quotations of past, or popular, language usage, but redefines them through textual mechanisms of displacement, deformation and ironization that foreground their inherent inadequacy. And in doing so, his work also foregrounds his language's own rhetorical inadequacy.

In short, by self-consciously blending as many syntactic and signification units in the poems as it does, Bernstein's poetics contests the linguistic conditions of *word-ability* upon which its own existence depends.

³ Charles Bernstein, *My Way* (1999), p. 18.

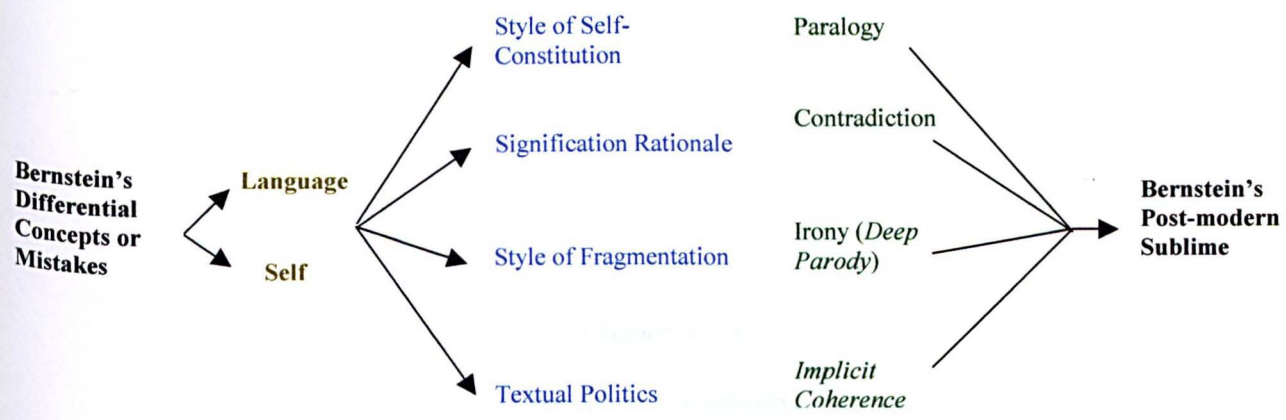
Apparently distrustful of his language's abilities to represent the complexities of its complex areas of self-conscious meanings, his poetics only tentatively legitimates its own linguistic being, offering its difference not as a definite difference, but, curiously, *as a possible treatment of it*.

In this way, Bernstein continues searching for 'unpresentable', as Lyotard puts it, or non-word-able levels of aesthetic inference to his particular playful tone of the 'sublime' (PMC:78). But more importantly, in this way, his poetics truly asserts its contextual difference by only tentatively asserting it. That is, whereas many types of contemporary poetry, experimental and conventional, including some of the Language poets' themselves (e.g. Perelman's and Hejinián's) aspire after true presence, after actuality and compelling existence, Bernstein's aspires after disappearance, defined, not as invisibility, but as formal and contextual freedom. Bernstein's aesthetics is therefore, by nature, too ambitious, searching for poetic or linguistic enactments of the complexity of what he sees as the 'continuous choices of interpretation that confronting the world involves' (CD:396).

Significantly, most critical considerations of Bernstein's work have only partially hinted at such leitmotifs in his poetics, much less accounted for their developmental significance in the overall signature of his poetics. In this sense, the following chapters will argue that in terms of Bernstein's *styles of textual fragmentation* and his general *formal politics*, his work is best understood as comprising two different phases; an early, predominantly *readerly*, phase: from the late 1970s to approximately the late 1980s, and a late, predominantly *performerly*, phase: from approximately the early 1990s to the present. However, in terms of his *signification rationale* and *style of self-constitution*, his work generally offers little, or mostly decorative, changes, reaffirming these leitmotifs throughout his poetic career.

In short, the poetics of Bernstein's writing is best demonstrated along the two main parameters of *language* and *self*, comprising each a complex relationship with the other and defining as such the over all style or register of his writing. The following chapters will, therefore, consider Bernstein's poetics as a culmination of both; his textual concept of the poetic self and his textual interpretation of language's poetic and social role, primarily in terms of the functions of reference, gesture and form, and the role of readership, as offered by the textual dynamics of his works. We will also discuss his style of textual fragmentation and his general textual politics as inseparable dimensions of his textual concept of language. An examination, therefore, of the particular ways in which the elements of grammar, sequence, performance, humour and unit of writing (the paragraph / stanza, the

sentence, the word) define their aesthetic and cultural roles in his poetics, as well as of the particular aesthetic effects his work typically aspires to achieve. The following diagram may best illustrate the relationships of the various aspects of his poetics.



Put in words, the combination between Bernstein's textual concepts of language and self offer the key constitutive elements comprising his poetics. They define, and are defined by, his style of self-constitution, his signification methods, his styles of textual fragmentation and his general politics of poetic form, in their individual signatures and implied significances. They do that through their adoption of the kind of 'paralogy', 'contradiction', *deep parody* and *implicit coherence* described in the last part. As such, they ultimately culminate in his own tone of the postmodern 'sublime' in which a mixture of explicit playfulness and implicit pain, rather than pleasure and grandeur pain, takes precedence.

Chapter Four

Mistakes of Visibility:

Paralogy and Contradiction in Bernstein's Poetic Self

If the political dimensions of self-expression in writing can generally be defined, and critiqued, in terms of varying degrees of cultural consciousness, Bernstein's work offers a particularly political kind of poetic self. On the one hand, it is distinctive enough to warrant a consideration of a strong cultural consciousness. On the other hand, it is investigative enough to refute the presence of a singular, if politically neutral, perspectivism. In other words, Bernstein's poetic self avoids four basic traits:

1. The highly self-conscious valorization of the writer's inner life, emotions and moral judgements of the kind offered by Robert Lowell's poetry.
2. The structuredness of the partially thematized symbolism that still permits the relatively unitary subjectivity in the work of fragmentary writers like Burroughs and Ashbery.
3. The experimental stability of the harmonious visual balance between form and meaning that offers a supplementary, but, still, singular subjectivity in the work of Concrete poets such Robert Lax and Eugen Gomringer.
4. The programmatic randomness of a self-sufficient formal presence underwritten by a pre-suggested, but insulated, subjectivity in the work of John Cage and Jackson Mac Low.

As Mac Low himself acknowledges:

It is often difficult for the reader to tell when the "I" in a line is Charles and when it is a persona, and if the latter, when the mask is that of a "real person" and when it is that of a fiction. But even when Charles speaks through a mask, one hears his own voice as an ironic counterpoint to the words of the persona.¹

But, as Bernstein himself notes:

Whatever comes out comes out on account of a variety of psychological dispositions, personal experiences, & literary pre-occupations & preconceptions. The best of the writing that gets called automatic issues from a series of choices as deliberate & reflected as can be. (CD:46-47)

¹ Jackson Mac Low, 'Charles Bernstein & His Shade', *The Difficulties*: Charles Bernstein's Issue, Vol. 2, no. 1 (Fall, 1982), p. 54.

In this sense, Bernstein's poetic self underwrites the multi-dimensionality of its presence in language as diffusion, even confusion, of its possible re-unification in readership. In his 'State of the Art' (1991), Bernstein also argues:

What interests me is a poetry and a poetics that do not edit out so much as edit in: that include multiple conflicting perspectives and types of languages and styles in the same poetic work.

(AP:2)

On the one hand, Bernstein's poetic self follows his suggestions by upholding what Hutcheon calls 'the enunciating act' (POP:74) as itself its ultimate, and by definition, continuously changing, contours. On the other hand, as we shall find out, it opposes those suggestions by the exactness of its paradoxical textual designs. In this sense, the poetic self in Bernstein's aesthetic is both identifiable and self-cancelling, 'editing in' as much as 'editing out', present and too fluid to home onto using conventional logics of self-expression, placeable within the work and easily replaceable by each act of its re-writing in readership. In this way, both its identity and its argument against identification become *equally present* and *equally tentative*. That is to say, it is basically differential, continuous and discontinuous with its own suggestions and insinuations.

While most critical comments on Bernstein's poetic-self have largely agreed on its particularity, they have disagreed, with varying degrees of application specificity, on its positive complexity. There are three general groups of critics in this regard. The first primarily argues for the mere existence of a poetic self in the writings of such Language poets as Bernstein and Hejinian, despite their rejection of conventional versions of self-expression. The second essentializes this dichotomy by questioning these poets' general commitments to what is seen as their own ideals. And the third attempts to discuss some of the more specific traits of Bernstein's poetic self.

Of the first group, Marjorie Perloff's more recent essay 'Language Poetry and the Lyric Subject' (1999), for example, argues that 'such counters as "syntacticality" or "the disappearance of the referent" or even "the materiality of the sign" cannot alter the fact that we can easily tell a Charles Bernstein poem from one by

McCaffery'.² More forcefully emphasizing Bernstein's aesthetic as an opposition to the 'identity poetics' and the 'singularity of voice', Brian Henry's 'Review of Bernstein's *My Way*' (1999) sees it as keeping 'unwillingly or unwittingly, a recognizable way of writing'.³ Scott Hightower takes this line of argument a step further in his review of the same book (1999) when defining Bernstein's poetic self as 'self indulgent in style'.⁴ More generally, Geoff Ward's Internet review of the same book (1999) points to Bernstein's 'genuinely new thinking on identity politics'.⁵

Of the second group, Paul Mann's 'Review of Bernstein's *The Politics of Poetic Form*' (1994) considers Bernstein's poetics primarily as an attack on the 'illusion of an autonomous coherent subject' and questions his, and the Language poets' more general, commitment to their anti commodifying ideals by asking: 'to what degree are they themselves increasingly dependent on the "reification" of individual poetic identities, for instance in their own book-marketing?'.⁶ Building upon this line of argument, Peter Baker's 'Review of Bernstein's *A Poetics*' (1993) comments on the way in which what he calls the 'Marxist's mode' of cultural interrogation in Bernstein's writings demonstrates, in his view, 'Bernstein's working premise that we are all working simply to catch up to where the poets (always) already are'.⁷ By contrast, Paul Naylor's key article '(Mis) Characterizing Charlie: Language and The Self in the Poetry and Poetics of Charles Bernstein' (1995) argues against the way in which 'the language game of critical discourse has characterized Bernstein in particular and the group of poets with which he is associated ... under the rubric of either Marxism or poststructuralism'.⁸

² Marjorie Perloff, 'Language Poetry and the Lyric Subject: Ron Silliman's Albany, Susan Howe's Buffalo', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 25, no. 3 (Spring, 1999), pp. 405-34.

³ Brian Henry, 'Review of Bernstein's *My Way*', *Lagniappe*, Vol. 1, no. 3 (Summer, 1999), Internet journal: <http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~foust/lagniappe.html>

⁴ Scott Hightower, 'Review of Bernstein's *My Way*', *Library Journal*, Vol. 124, no. 2 (February, 1999), p. 86.

⁵ Geoff Ward, 'My Way: *Speeches and Poems*, A Review', *Boston Review*, (October / November, 1999), Internet version: <http://bostonreview.mit.edu/BR24.5/ward.html>

⁶ Paul Mann, 'Review of Bernstein's *The Politics of Poetic Form*', *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 35, no. 1 (Spring, 1994), pp. 171-82.

⁷ Peter Baker, 'Review of Bernstein's *A Poetics*', *College Literature*, Vol. 20, no. 2 (June, 1993), pp. 219-22.

⁸ Paul Naylor, '(Mis) Characterizing Charlie: Language and The Self in the Poetry and Poetics of Charles Bernstein', *Sagetrieb*, Vol. 14, no. 3 (Winter, 1995), pp. 119-38.

Significantly, both Baker's and Mann's suggestions seem partially accurate, not so much, however, in terms of the Marxist or poststructuralist identity of Bernstein's aesthetics. Rather, I suggest they are so, in terms of two, possibly three, ways. Firstly, as I have attempted to indicate before, and as the following pages will elaborate in detail, Bernstein's work practises a *substantial* amount of *disguised control* over the language of his texts (much more than in Hejinian's case for example) indicated by *the counterbalancing preciseness* of his syntactic architecture, which seems to keep open his earlier theoretical emphasis on 'letting it happen' (CD:41). Secondly, like most Language poetries, Bernstein's insists on a distinct writing personality, which may itself be seen as a form of idealization of individuality in writing, redefining the kind of sociality of language that he and his fellow Language poets persistently endorse. Thirdly, both observations indicate a seeming compromise in Bernstein's anti-commodifying ideals which view confessionality as a form of market-reification of poetry, but only partially, since his philosophy of poetic form makes its point by leaving all sorts of contradictory signification possibilities open.

However, Naylor's, Hightower's, Ward's, Perloff's and Henry's observations *are also partially accurate*, not simply, however, in terms of the existence or non-existence of stylistic idiosyncrasy in Bernstein's work. But also, I suggest, they are so, in similarly two, possibly three, ways. Firstly, Bernstein's poetic idiosyncrasy is contextualized, as we shall see, within his poetics' equally compelling interrogations of conventional, and more experimental, methods of poetic self-expression. Secondly, Bernstein's poetics seems less resignable to a stable ideological identity than to a multitude of poetic and non-poetic philosophical and intellectual registers as I have attempted to indicate in the previous part of this thesis. And thirdly, in terms of what we can draw from all the previous observations with regard to the multiplicity of identification levels on which Bernstein's poetics often offers its equations and contradictions.

This is demonstrated, to a certain extent, by the critical approaches of the third group. In his book Opposing Poetries (1996), Hank Lazer, for example, suggests that Bernstein's 'distinctive and idiosyncratic form of self' represents an insistence on his presence in poems as a kind of textual 'besidedness', concluding that this 'self dissemination bears with it personal traces'.⁹ By contrast, Michael Greer, in his article 'Ideology and Theory in

⁹ Hank Lazer, Opposing Poetries, Volume Two: Readings (1996), p. 129.

Recent Experimental Writing' (1989), emphasizes the more dialectical level of Language poetry's general ways of regarding the question of poetic self-representation, observing that:

By problematizing poetic language along the two fundamental axes of communication and referentiality, "language poetry" effects a shift in the relationship of the (writing) subject to poetic discourse, from a notion of the self as a speaker or voice located outside the text, to a notion of the subject as a constructed moment or effect within various intersecting discourses.¹⁰

In this sense, this chapter aims to achieve a double goal. Firstly, it will build upon the relevant suggestions of the above critics; particularly Greer's idea of 'intersecting discourses' and Lazer's of the 'besidedness' of Bernstein's poetic self. This will allow us to discuss Bernstein's poetic self in terms of a blending between its partially negative and partially positive textual traits on the one hand, and its more complex doubts and negotiations with its chosen areas of challenge and signification on the other. Primarily, this will elaborate the particular kind of 'paralogy' Bernstein's poetics most often offers. More specifically, I will argue that Bernstein's textual concept of self and its syntactic idiosyncratic components respectively transcend both the sort of 'besidedness' Lazer suggests, to offer instability of structure or *multiplicity* of form, and the kind of clear 'intersection' of discourses Greer implies, to offer intrinsically *differential*, or paralogical, levels of signification. Secondly, this chapter aims, *rather differently*, to explain in detail the particular stylistic features and contextual mechanisms participating in the constitution of such paralogical and contradictory rationales in terms of both their writership and readership materialization strategies and impacts.

The work collected in Bernstein's poetry volume Rough Trades (1991), especially his poem 'House of Formaldehyde', typify his particular type of poetic self-constitution, in terms of five main characteristics:

1. Its insistence on both its states of presence and absence.
2. Its continuous re-definition of one state by the other.
3. Its concern with representing its own multi-levels of linguistic possibilities of existence.
4. Its implied emphasis on its mutational qualities such as undecidability and indeterminism between the writership and the readership processes.

¹⁰ Michael Greer, 'Ideology and Theory in Recent Experimental Writing or, The Naming of "Language Poetry"', Boundary 2, Vol. 16, no. 2 / 3 (1989), p. 343.

5. Its positive paradoxicality as a testing, and a questioning, of the various degrees of existence its meanings convey in reception.

Collectively, these characteristics embody what I will generally discuss as the decentralizing and destabilizing factors of Bernstein's work (unlike those critics who see Bernstein's work primarily, in terms of its oppositional or accommodational factors). This poem, which critic Pierre Joris typically reviewed as 'a collage of discourse fragments from extremely heterogeneous origins',¹¹ begins.

It's not where you're going, it's
Where you've been. Dateline
In the harbor. Fellow rushes
For funding, fuming, flipping,
Flaccid: rimless erosion, witless
Emulsification. As on a bent,
Meal, plaid, plane, a girl,
Holds a pail, defends a swirl

Stumbling for eviscerated lead hooks
Englotted, Nordic stoops
Whosoever irradiates decay, plunged
As pediment, foaming sail, lining the
Shifts with spongy (spectacular) spatulas.

Horatio of spell-bent positioning, fusing
Co-spaniel foresight and copper-wire calumny
Against the grain of saddlestitch cornmash.
Precisely giddy, morosely fecundated. Snorkling
& then snookered. Roadside rest-test adjoined
to defamilial tireiron. (Unhooks what's
best left loose). As was fonder than
Revenants. Neither a fender nor a succotash
Be. (Merely a spittoon of her petunia.) Seeking
Not or seeing blotted – wave-high the croon,

¹¹ Joris, Pierre, 'Review of Bernstein's *Rough Trades*', *American Book Review*, (February / March, 1993), Internet version: <http://wings.buffalo.edu/cpc/authors/bernstein/reviews/abr-joris.html>

Defrock the peeling Argonaut. I would
 Not sink her ship nor span her
 Border as lacking sun-stained
 Catapults. Neither have I...
 Whose defection can only pronounce insipience
 As the promise leadens enactment
 & the dusted gables parrot the stick to which
 Only lessening accounts. The serpentine miles
 Of the long laundered parade dissolve
 In gulps, becalmed forays. Having hidden
 My amulets & fired my token,
 Alone on a dust-dark sea, with only
 Thee. Or wails oasis, deeded ground
 Where foot cannot fall, & felled, retains.¹²

In almost every part of this poem, there is a forceful expression of some sort of poetic self and, at the same time, a forceful denial of it; an affirmation of its presence and a simultaneous deflation of its conceivable contours. From the beginning of the poem 'It's not where you're going, it's / where you've been' through the middle 'I would / Not sink her ship nor span her / Border' and up to the end 'My amulets', every insinuation, implication or suggestion of an author's voice; of a specific personal stance, perspective or angle of vision, is almost always followed, preceded, or both, by an equally strong diffusion, or confusion, of these indications.

For example, the beginning of the last part of the poem, starting with 'Horatio of spell-bent positioning', juxtaposes many superficially unrelated sentences, phrases and words such as 'fusing / Co-spaniel foresight and copper-wire calumny / Against the grain of saddlestitch cornmash. / Precisely giddy, morosely fecundated. Snorkling, / & then snookered. Roadside rest test adjoined / to defamilial tireiron. (Unhooks what's / best left loose.) that form an overall syntactic register of unconventional disconnectedness. This register acts to blur or confuse the seemingly conventional, if discursive, reference to a poetic self indicated in the lines "I would / Not sink her ship nor span her / Border' or in the clause 'having hidden / My amulets & fired my token'.

¹² Charles Bernstein, Rough Trades (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1991), pp. 46-47.

The poem, however, does not attempt to obliterate its indications of a poetic-self altogether. Nor does it simply seek balance between the presence and the lack of such a self. Rather, it offers a process of continuous re-definition of one state: the presence, by the other; the absence. That is, a process of continuous re-definition that works from within each of these states' very discourses of presence and absence as well as from outside, asserting both otherness and difference concomitantly.

For example, the sentence 'Whosoever irradiates decay' in the second part of the poem **blends** both references to a possible unitary poetic subjectivity or self and to a possible delimitation of such self's perceptual contours. **As most of Bernstein's phrasal constructions, this phrase offers an independent micro completion of meanings in each of its available possibilities of interpretation while blending such possibilities in its overall readership effect.** Considered discursively, the sentence 'Whosoever irradiates decay' suggests a complaint of some description; or a question that implies the answer within it; who irradiates decay? The answer of which may be deduced from the question itself as he or she who is decaying, which is subsequently re-affirmed by the negative connotations of the bracketed word '(spectacular)' implying a rejection to contemporary commodifying media sensationalism. As such, this possibility of interpretation can be seen as one independent unit of meaning; a micro completion of suggestions implied by the architectural specificity of the phrase itself.

However, both the question and the possible answer identify a subjective presence or a self that complains, or asks and insinuates an answer. They identify, in other words, an individuality that, in turn, implies 'otherness'. Yet, the interjections adjacent to the word 'who', in the beginning of the phrase, acts to question that supposition. 'Soever' in conjunction with 'who', to become 'whosoever', defuses the pointedness of the reference to a unified self, which the word 'who' alone may be seen to suggest, asserting, thereby, 'difference'. Thus, 'soever' suggests non-identifiability to the voice asking, to the answer inspired and to the identity implied. Combined together 'Whosoever' claims all at once, a singularity; '(Who)soever, a plurality; 'Whoso(ever)' and a deniability; 'Who(so)ever', or *otherness* and *difference* concomitantly. As such, it affirms both the kind of 'enunciating subjectivity' (POP:75) and the sort of profound multiplicity, with which the last chapter has redefined Hutcheon's concept of 'contradiction' (pp. 101-102). Again, this possibility of interpretation springs from the structural particularity of the phrase itself, defining another self-contained unit, or micro completion, of meaning.

Equally significant, is this phrase's representation of the paralogical presence and absence of Bernstein's poetic self. From one point of view, such a contradictory phraseology as 'Whosoever irradiates decay' identifies a poetic self predominantly concerned with *re-presenting* its own multi-levels of linguistic possibilities of existence in order to allow maximum re-interpretative association in readership. From another, it identifies a poetic self that is basically a **mistake**, since it insists on presence by the very act of deliberately confusing its presence, threatening its whole existence as such. It is, therefore, paralogically structured inasmuch as it questions the normative rules of presence in its usual language game and insofar as it is an emphasis on 'the differential' (PMC:65) rather than on the stable. As critic Patricia Monaghan observes, in her review of Bernstein's book *My Way* (1999), 'there is something here to irritate almost everyone'.¹³ But also, as critic and fellow Language poet Nick Piombino points out:

Bernstein's style allows for a full evocation of the vulnerable, fluctuating identity in its formation and dissolution, surrounded by the refracted bits and pieces of experience in which it is reflected. Individual access to identity is attainable by means of a responsible acknowledgement of the self through its relationship and connection with others, through the expansion of alternative ways of comprehending meaning, and the recognition of one's personal access to the tools of language.¹⁴

Significantly, it is those very 'alternative ways' of signification that serve to 'expand', or extend, rather than 'intend', the 'poly' (CD:396) or multiple levels of constitution in which Bernstein's poetic self identifies its potentialities both aesthetically and culturally. On aesthetic grounds, Bernstein's poetic self reaches for an area of collaborative textuality that attempts, and only ever attempts, to be more *just* in enacting the degree of differentiability it seems to associate with itself in the poetic consciousness of the text. On cultural grounds, Bernstein's poetic self attempts to invest in the reader its doubts and confusions urging them to perceive it, as well as any other self, as an ensemble of competing paradoxes rather than a harmonious diversity (or a 'collage' in Joris's terms). In his interview with Tom Beckett (1982), Bernstein offers his own definition of the significance of his poetic self:

¹³ Patricia Monaghan, 'My Way: Speeches and Poems, A Review', *Booklist*, Vol. 95, no. 8 (December 15th, 1998), p. 720.

¹⁴ Nick Piombino, 'Writing, Identity and the Self', *The Difficulties: Charles Bernstein's Issue*, Vol. 2, no. 1 (Fall, 1982), p. 49.

The self (is) constituted by a matrix of language that envelops an individual ... So, is the 'self' the impression of a mold or the particular form of maladaptation to it, or what? Individuals are in essence that which is maladapted, idiocentric, resistant; it is in that sense that we get to know (one) another only through the identification and appreciation of their (our) peculiarities as particularized – mutant – and not as instances of some generalized feature of some genre of humans. The reason there may be some value still in the author ('s) function is that the 'I' in a text operates as a very pertinent measure of the constituting capacity of language. Formally, the 'I' allows the language's formative capacities to be scanned. (My Brackets)¹⁵

Here, Bernstein's comments helpfully establish the intellectual link between the general aesthetic strategy of poetic self-constitution in his work (its textual dimension) and his views on language's social constitutive powers (its conceptual or philosophical dimension). However, his attempt to approach the dynamics of this self's textual interactions in his writing seems, as Piombino perceptively observes, to 'underestimate the complexity of the self's construct'.¹⁶ Our use of Hutcheon's concept of 'contradiction' in terms of the 'ex-centric' or 'the off-centre' helps to elaborate this sort of poetic presence more accurately, insofar as it is 'neither uncertain nor suspending of judgement' (POP:62); neither an absolutist uncertainty nor an indefinite suspension of belief. Bernstein's paralogical style of self-constitution works by simultaneously fusing and defusing various composite suggestions, states and registers, aspiring after a sort of over-all zero-effect between contrasting micro completions of suggestive meanings, but not quite achieving it either.

For example, this self's apparent emphases on textual collaboration between reader and writer, what Mann defines as resistance to the 'illusion of an autonomous coherent subject' (1990:171), is *fused* with the kind of authority that stems from its textual unfamiliarity, ambiguity and intellectual detachment in which the reader, as Baker also suggests, is working 'to catch up to (where) the poets already are' (1993:219). More significantly perhaps, this self's apparent attempt to be responsible before its own questions regarding the ways in which language forms poetic meaning in consciousness, is also *intmixed* with its apparent awareness of its own, at least partial, failure to answer those questions or to accurately embody this process.

¹⁵ Charles Bernstein, Interviewed by Tom Beckett, *The Difficulties: Charles Bernstein's Issue* (1982), p. 42.

¹⁶ Nick Piombino, 'Writing, Identity And The Self', *The Difficulties: Charles Bernstein's Issue* (1982), p. 49.

Additionally, the deliberate or precise *diffusions* of this self's own suggestions, what Hightower defines as 'self indulgent in style' (1999:86), and what Ward calls 'genuinely new thinking on identity politics' (1999:net), seem constructively inconsistent with its own utopian insistence on the sort of collaborative readership that these qualities endeavour to endorse. Yet, such diffusion itself seems also consistent with the general doubt and suspicion apparent in this self's linguistic abruptness, disjunction, grammatical and syntactic disruption and multi-dimensional suggestiveness, identifying it with conceptual openness and willingness for reinterpretation. **In this way, Bernstein's poetic self is both consistent and inconsistent with its own kind of game, continuous and discontinuous with its own perceptual drive for meaning. This is its logic and its cause; to demonstrate its contradiction (or multiplicity) as an aesthetic and cultural inevitability and its paralogy (or differentiability) as the only viable possibility for its being.**

In this particular sense, the deliberate 'maladaptation' of Bernstein's poetic self; its paralogical and contradictory existence (what he calls 'a poetry of tripping'¹⁷), cannot merely be a neutral 'measure' of 'constitution'. Its role cannot only be that of allowing language's formative powers to be more visible, or to be 'scanned', as Bernstein suggests, even if it aspires after a superficial zero-effect in which neither side of its presence / absence equation formally prevails. Rather, these traits must also be acting to influence such linguistic powers as well. This can easily be detected in the multiplicity of signification vectors through which this self passes in reception as it reaches these levels of contextual complexity.

Initially, Bernstein's poetic self, in the poem above, appears either strongly present or strongly mediated. This paradoxical co-presence of presence and absence generates what Paul Naylor insightfully terms 'passive representation of characterization'.¹⁸ Take, for instance, the first two sentences in the first part of the poem: 'It's not where you're going, it's / Where you've been'. At first glance, the two sentences in this specific sequence involve two parallel judgements; one of importance and one of non-importance; one for the future and one for the past; a forceful negation and an equally forceful affirmation. Both judgements presumably imply not only the presence of a unified visible self, that has preferences, negations and affirmations, but also one that seems to claim wisdom and priority over 'the other' in its symbolic contextualization of the second person singular:

¹⁷ Bernstein, A Conversation with the author, 09 / 12 / 2000.

¹⁸ Paul Naylor, '(Mis) Characterizing Charlie' (1995), p. 130.

'you'. Here, the presence of the poetic self, as suggested by these two sentences recalls conventional forms of language enveloped by, if centralizing, the author's self as an incontestable source of vision and medium of reflection.

However, superficially still, the remainder of the first part of this poem acts to mediate, deflate and effectively delimit the first two sentences' seeming encapsulation of a unitary subjective presence. By their very undecidability and indeterminism, they attempt to re-contextualize and re-define the conventionally self-expressionistic impressions suggested by the first two sentences, leaving the reader with a definite sense of disorientation as to the presence or the absence of such a poetic self.

Thus in question are not only the possibilities of inter-connectiveness in the remainder of that section of the poem, but also their very relevance to the first two sentences whose context they form. Words and phrases like 'Flaccid:rimless erosion, witless / Emulsification. As on a bent, / Meal, plaid, plane, a girl / holds a pail, defends a swirl' not only connote seeming disjunctions among themselves as such, but also between them and the visible, seemingly subjective, judgements of the first two sentences. In this way, Bernstein questions any definite relationship between words like 'erosion, witless, Emulsification' or sentences like 'a girl, Holds a pail, defends a swirl' and the other words and phrases that immediately precede them in the same section of the poem like 'Dateline, In the harbor', 'Fellow rushes', let alone their possible relationship to the first two sentences and to the remainder of the poem.

Here, the habits of accepting the hierarchical connotations implicit in the assumption of a personalizing identity underwriting this poem's direct use of textual strategies traditionally reserved for conventional poetic confessionality are effectively challenged by its own revisionist influence in the context of the poem. Repeatedly, Bernstein breaks textual and subjective clarities by proliferating disjunctive and profoundly paradoxical signification contexts and thereby achieving what he calls 'perceptual vividness' in the *multiplicity* of the 'operant mechanisms of meaning' (CD:36-7) rather than his emphasis on 'flowing freely' (CD:41). Bernstein explains this textual rationale in the following terms:

By shifting the contexts in which even a fairly 'standard' sentence finds itself... the seriality of the ordering of sentences within a paragraph displaces from its habitual surrounding the projected representational fixation that the sentence conveys... a perceptual vividness is

intensified for each sentence since the abruptness of the cuts induces a greater desire to savor the tangibility of each sentence before it is lost to the next, determinately other, sentence... As a result, the operant mechanisms of meaning are multiplied and patterns of projection in reading are less restricted. (CD: 36-7)

Yet, with a deeper look, and in the final stage of Bernstein's poetic self-constitution, the possibilities of both the presence and the absence of an identifiable poetic self are paradoxically equally present in the unique Bernsteinian blend of their paradoxical affirmations and disaffirmations. As such, the poetic self, itself, affects the processes of its own materialization in the language of the poem and is not a neutral medium for language's substantiality. As Silliman argues, 'the medium', in Bernstein's poetic self, 'is grounded in relation to social reality':

This temporally shattered and reconstructed subject gives Bernstein an instrument with which to pierce the veil of "pure abstraction" inhering in modern philosophy, in that focusing on the constitutive aspect of language, rather than treating it as a self-forming object.¹⁹

More significantly, perhaps, as Lyotard observes:

It is necessary to posit the existence of a power that destabilizes the capacity for explanation, manifested in the promulgation of new norms for understanding or, if one prefers, in a proposal to establish new rules circumscribing a new field of research for the language of science. (PMC: 61)

In so many words, then, Bernstein's poetic self offers itself as though it is a *mistake* designed, in Bernstein's words, to 'disrupt' the poetry 'business as usual' (AP:2) and, in Lyotard's, to 'destabilize the capacity for explanation' inherent in the conventional concepts of poetic identity. By proposing itself as a an influential linguistic and poetic 'power', rather than a *neutral* 'abstraction', as he himself suggests, it attempts to partially 'establish new rules', 'new norms for understanding' in its search for 'just' linguistic practice that may reflect its own conceptual paralogy and contradiction. Its arguments, so to speak, for a certain degree of absence within

¹⁹ Ron Silliman, 'For Charles Bernstein Has Such a Spirit', The Difficulties: Charles Bernstein's Issue (1982), p. 103.

presence, and vice versa, implicate, by nature, the question of (our) self(s) constitution by the language in which we live.

The most typical of Bernstein's textual ways of achieving this, as the discussion above demonstrates, is his diffusive tone of blending the conventional and the non-conventional within each other's contexts, and the resultant processes of mutational definition and re-definition in which each *micro completion* of suggestion is suddenly reconstituted and effectively re-defined in an acrobatic architectural play. This is apparent in most of Bernstein's writings, particularly in the openings of his poems. Consider for example the first line in his poem 'The Sheds of our Webs' from his book Resistance (1983) 'Floating on completely vested time, a lacricity' as opposed to the line that follows it 'to which abandon skirts another answer', or the beginning of his poem 'If there Were a God She Wouldn't Expect us to Believe in Her' (1983) in the same book; 'Inconsiderate replication / of dissident locomotion' as opposed to its following lines 'its steam got to / place, pace of / racket. Who honors / these chicken feed'.²⁰

By the same token, these lines from his poem 'The Simply' from The Sophist (1987); 'My hands / are cold but I see nonetheless with infrared / charm' contextualizes and are re-contextualized by their following lines 'Beyond these calms is a coast, handy but / worse for abuse. Frankly, hiding an adumbration of collectible / cathexis' in a sort of particularly Bernsteinian suddenness of movement. The same is notable with his poem 'From Lines of Swinburne' in the same book whose opening line 'As a voice in a vision that's vanished' redefines its following lines 'Perjured dark and barer accusation / Song of a pole congealed' and is redefined by it in this special kind of syntactic shifting.

²⁰ Charles Bernstein, The Republics of Reality: 19975 – 1995 (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 2000), pp. 262-63.

Chapter Five

Mistakes of Readability:

Bernstein's Development and Language

There are two significant questions that have not been fully addressed in the last chapter. The first is: why does Bernstein's style of self-constitution employ this blending tactic of linear within non-linear, or conventional within unconventional, or normative within non-normative, or conjunctive within disjunctive, as a favourite poetic technique? And the second is: what kind of aesthetic effect does such a tactic aspire to achieve in terms of his more general politics of form?

The answer to the first question, this chapter addresses in terms of two parts. The first concerns Bernstein's particular signification rationale and his use of one form of language: the experimental, as a commentary or critique of the other: the conventional, in what chapter 3 has discussed in terms of *deep parody*. The second, concerns Bernstein's style of textual fragmentation and his attempt to offer the combined weight of his textual qualities as a way of producing meaning beyond the actual presence of these qualities in the text, in what chapter 2 has discussed in terms of *implicit coherence*. The answer to the second question will be addressed in the following chapter by reference to our previous discussion of Lyotard's concept of the postmodern 'sublime' (PMC:77).

Most critics have considered the implications of such questions rather too generally despite their obvious importance to the specific cultural and aesthetic significances of Bernstein's poetics. For example, in his discussion of Bernstein's poetry volume Controlling Interests (1980), Tenney Nathanson, a year before Pierre Joris's 'Review of Bernstein's Rough Trades' (1993:net), similarly identifies this blending tactic in terms of a 'narrative linguistic collage' that 'intersperses standardized business-style language with fractured phrases of a similar, but dissociative nature'.¹ By contrast, Susan M. Schultz's article 'Of Time and Charles Bernstein's Lines' (2001) partially recognizes this quality in terms of what she calls 'radical disconnection between parts' which, in her view, 'forms the core of Bernstein's poetics'.² However, as the last chapter has attempted to show, this blending tactic is more accurately identified in terms of the counterbalancing exactness of Bernstein's *contradictory* textual architecture which often fuses, as we shall further demonstrate, multiple suggestions including, rather than essentializing, 'radical disconnection' between its component elements. The whole point

¹ Tenney Nathanson, 'Collage and Pulverization in Contemporary American Poetry: Charles Bernstein's Controlling Interests', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 33, no. 2 (Summer, 1992), pp. 302-19.

² Susan M. Schultz, 'Of Time and Charles Bernstein's Lines: A Poetics of Fashion Statements', Jacket, no. 14 (July, 2001), Internet journal: <http://jacketmagazine.com/14/schultz-bernstein.html>

of his poetics' politics of form is to refute essential binarities and, to a large extent, there are no such fixable or permanent positions in his texts, but rather a multiplicity and a paralogy.

However, Pat Monaghan's article 'Review of *Dark City*' (1994) reinforces Nathanson's argument by identifying Bernstein's poetics with the aggregation of a 'wild pastiche of thought, image and the grit of the ordinary'.³ Rather differently, acknowledging 'the paradoxical quality to Bernstein' as an indication of 'commitment to art for art's sake', Tim Wood's introduction to his interview with Bernstein (2000) paradoxically concludes that Bernstein 'believes that poetry can be political' and 'can reach people'.⁴

Other critics and writers, discuss Bernstein's poetics in even more generalized lights.⁵ For example, James Shivers' 'Review of *Close Listening*' (1998/9) defines the complexity of Bernstein's textual techniques simply as an emphasis on 'reading' not just as 'a side issue of poetry', but rather as 'one of its necessary constructions'.⁶ By contrast, John Palattella's 'Review of *A Poetics*' (1994) sees Bernstein's general politics as an attempt to 'historicize critique without succumbing to the New Historical "one-two punch" of consensus / dissension'.⁷ Similarly, in his 'Review of *My Way*' (1999), Andrew Osborn considers Bernstein's poetics in terms of questioning what he calls 'the value of communication' suggesting that 'while it is all very well now and then to stir things up, turbulence and blur do little to assure readers and listeners that communication is

³ Patricia Monaghan, 'Review of Bernstein's *Dark City*', *Booklist*, Vol. 90, no. 18 (May 15th, 1994), p. 1660.

⁴ Tim Wood, 'Charles Bernstein: Politics, Poetics, and Laughter Against Tears, An Interview', *ArtsDFW.com.net.org*, (April, 2000), Internet journal: http://www.artsdfw.com/article.php?id_serial=343

⁵ The anonymous review of Bernstein's work in such journals as *Publisher's Weekly* underlines the importance of this quality of Bernstein's compositional philosophy by asserting its general contrasting effects in readership. Commenting on his latest collection of earlier writings, *The Republics of Reality* (2000), in its issue 13, Vol. 247 (March 27th, 2000), p. 72, this journal argues that Bernstein's 'attention to spoken language' makes his work 'both welcoming and discomfoting, expressionalistically cinematic but not without its eye-wink satiric narrative'. And in its earlier review of Bernstein's poetry volume *Dark City* (1994), the same journal suggests that his work primarily explores 'the way in which sounds and signs conspire to confuse and instruct', Vol. 241, no. 13 (March 28th, 1994), pp. 87-88.

⁶ James Shivers, 'Review of Bernstein's *Close Listening*', *Washington Review On Line*, Vol. 24, no. 4 (December / January, 1998/99), Internet Journal: <http://washingtonreview.com/xxxiv4.htm>

⁷ John Palattella, 'Review of Bernstein's *A Poetics*', *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 35, no. 1 (Spring, 1994), pp. 182-95.

being treated as a high value, that what Philosopher H. P. Grice calls the Cooperative Principle is being upheld'.⁸

My approach to the questions I have asked above, as the reader might have predicted, will negotiate more specific answers to these questions that are based on the textual dynamics of the poems themselves. It is my argument, therefore, that Bernstein's signification rationale employs normative language uses within non-normative uses in order to ironically reveal the limits of those 'normative' language uses themselves and to challenge the kind of linearity of thought they often represent. This is, of course, **in addition to offering contradictory and paralogical meanings as an exploration of language's influence on our consciousness of reality**, enticing readers to share the same kind of thought. We have seen this in the previous chapter with regard to Bernstein's poetic self and we shall see it henceforth with regard to his processes of poetic signification and to his more general politics of form.

In doing so, however, as consistently as they do, Bernstein's textual strategies also emphasize his control over the linguistic materials of his texts and hint at a certain degree of writerly authority, which eventually limits, rather than continually supplements, readers' gestural freedom to re-inscribe his poems' aesthetic meanings. Springing primarily from the exactness of the contrasts between the conventional and the non-conventional in Bernstein's compositional strategies, this writerly authority is itself a side effect of these strategies' insistence on parodying the authoritative limitations of normative language uses. As such, it is implicated in the very limitations it is designed to challenge. That is, to say, it is critically self-reflexive. Nevertheless, Bernstein's style of textual fragmentation utilizes the collective suggestiveness of his poems' formal and contextual qualities to connote areas of *implicit coherence* beyond such poems' immediate structural necessities, allowing the reader ample room for collaboration and re-definition.

In this way, I will suggest that despite the transformation of Bernstein's poetics from an early (1970s and 1980s) readerly to a late (1990s to present) performerly poetics, his use of either and, sometimes, both (readerly and performerly) qualities generally succeeds in maintaining his work's capacities for offering primarily *implicit*, rather than explicit, possibilities of meanings and suggestions.

⁸ Andrew Osborn, 'Review of Bernstein's *My Way*', Chicago Review, (Summer – Fall, 1999), p. 173.

1. Signification Rationale and *Deep Parody*:

The syntactic familiarity or conventionality of the first two sentences of Bernstein's poem 'House of Formaldehyde' (1991), discussed in the last chapter, 'It's not where you're going, it's / where you have been', serves not only as a way of producing the state of 'presence' in the paralogical equations of Bernstein's poetic self, but also as a representative of normative methods of expression at large. Formally, it functions as a sort of citation from such methods. In the same vein, the syntactic unconventionality of the remainder of that section 'Dateline / In the harbor. Fellow rushes / For funding, fuming, flipping / Flaccid:rimless erosion, witless / Emulsification. As on a bent / Meal, plaid, plane, a girl/ Holds a pail, defends a swirl' acts, not only as a way of producing the state of 'absence' in that contradictory poetic self, but also as a syntactic commentary on these very methods; a parodic critique of their implied limitations.

The sudden, or unexpected, movement underlined in this type of blending between the conventional and the unconventional offers more than just an alternative to discursive or binary signification methods. **The syntactic architecture of the two sentences enacts a parodization of the assumptions of clarity implicit in our normative expectations of discursive order.** Its deformation of that order seeks to highlight different areas of meaning and, ultimately, different kinds of order. That is, in Hutcheon's words, 'an ironic revisiting' (PPM:103) of the past, or an ironic redefinition of past linguistic uses that works structurally to parody the inabilities of such assumptions and expectations to deal with the kind of differential meanings this architecture offers.

However, in contrasting the conventional and the non-conventional in this direct and deliberate manner, Bernstein's formal architecture highlights at least two major limitations of its own. Firstly, it highlights the amount of control practised over the play-area of the text, which makes for the same sort of authoritativeness it wishes to parody and critique in normative language uses. Secondly, it highlights its knowledge of the impossibility of **perfect** representation, indicated by its insistence on such control, which mediates the visibility of its proposed alternative order of perception. As such, this architecture does not, perhaps cannot, protect itself from being the object of its own parodic design, since its targeting area is simply too general to avoid self-reflection. As his fellow Language poet Bob Perelman hints:

There seems to be a very strong sense of worry involved in Bernstein's writing aspiring to be so open and porous that it almost falls apart on the way to the reader's head, so to speak.⁹

We can see this not only in terms of Bernstein's particular method of poetic self-constitution, which depends on various contrasting micro completions of meanings, as we have seen in the last chapter, but in terms of his work's signification rationale at large. Let us, for instance, consider four examples from different periods of Bernstein's poetry: 'Company Life' from Controlling Interests (1980), 'Renumberation' from The Sophist (1987), 'Locks Without Doors' from Dark City (1994) and 'Gertrude and Ludwig's Bogus Adventure' from My Way (1999). Controlling Interests (1980) has typically been characterized by critics such as Tenney Nathanson and Paul Quinn respectively with 'giddy incongruity and the repeated shock of recognition'¹⁰ and with 'syntactically severed sentences', 'encouraging the reader to construct a fuller sense, rather than take the word of authority on trust'.¹¹ Bernstein, himself, however, defines his own poetic approach in this book as 'sociocentric', arguing that 'in each poem, the coherence that *it* requires is worked out in a way that doesn't necessarily apply outside its specific occasion' (CD:408).

From 'Company Life', 1980.

Consummation of impossible sorrows

Residues of the previous

marks

as the motion of a glance

scatters, as

misled, a kind of

autumnal (puff

quickly rushes

for, around

only asked

makes much of

induced memory

shouting to

⁹ Bob Perelman, 'A Note on "Sentences My Father Used"', The Difficulties: Charles Bernstein's Issue (1982), p. 90.

¹⁰ Tenney Nathanson, 'Collage and Pulverization' (1992), p. 308.

¹¹ Paul Quinn, 'Rattling the Chains of Free Verse' (1999), Internet version:
<http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/bernstein/joris.html>

amorous
 double view
 I've
 meant to tell you
 all, this
 otherwise unrecognisable
 encountered
 with escalators confining the
 levels, we
 overhear, overmuch
 are, am
 shattered crystal, blown
 much as melts
 & trickles, I wish
 miniaturized in our desires
 as cubical follows cubical
 next to an out-of-doors
 even more interior
 (too plain
 a pie, glysemic
 hope for sudden
 changes, lifts
 out or made for
 clips
 pen & tie
 you wish...¹²

The poem starts with a general denial, yet also an affirmation of belief. The phrase 'A consummation of impossible sorrow' does not by itself tell us much with regard to whose sorrow? For what? And most importantly why? Yet, it also informs, particularly in conjunction with the poem's title 'Company life', of some sort of description to the way in which the poem sees the pressures of the contemporary work place. However, the definition that follows over-generalizes this suggestion rather than explains or focuses it. 'Residues of the previous, marks' leaves the reader wondering not only about the 'marks' it means, but also if it is itself related to the first sentences by way of association, encouraging the reader, as Quinn suggests, not to take 'the authority' of the word 'on trust'.¹³

¹² Charles Bernstein, *Controlling Interests* (New York: Roof, 1980), pp. 19-20.

¹³ Paul Quinn, 'Rattling the Chains of Free Verse' (1999), Internet version: <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/bernstein/joris.html>

The remainder of the poem works in much the same way to deflate the definite possibilities that may be inspired by the first two phrases. The phrase 'As the motion of a glance' deceptively implicates a designation of a continuity that never actually happens. The conjunction 'as' presumes an action continuing in time or *tense* either before, during, or after it. Yet, the first two phrases immediately preceding it contain no verb, hence; no tense. The only two verbs in the two phrases immediately following it, 'scatters' and 'misled', are in sharp contrast between the present-tense and the past (or the past participle) modes, giving no orientation of either a past or a present tense. The verb 'misled' is itself preceded by another almost completely indefinable 'as' and the verb 'scatters' is similarly followed by a past tense 'misled'. One particularly significant textual feature of this composition which reinforces this open signification method is the leaving unclosed of brackets throughout the poem, such as the left bracket before the phrase '(puff, quickly rushes' as well as the left bracket before '(too plain' near the end of the poem.

As the poem progresses, the intensity of disjunction and apparent disconnectedness increases. Thus, we see the abrupt juxtaposition of short phrasal bursts, each almost completely independent from the other: 'autumnal (puff / quickly rushes / for, around / only asked / makes much of / induced memory / shouting to / amorous / double view', forming a fluctuating vibration of gestures; a wave of implicit and explicit connotations that leaves the reader susceptible to a profound *multiplicity* of impressions and interpretations.

In this sense, the familiar language use in the sentence 'I've meant to tell you' implies more than just its simple meaning. The architectural position of this sentence amongst highly dissociative and mutative phrasal joints and components seems to both represent and parody its own larger approach to signification; its given meaningfulness or what Quinn calls the 'authority' of the words (1999:net). The phrase 'all this' in its structural position after this sentence serves to reaffirm this kind of parodic gesture. The irony implied by the contrast between the seeming clarity and conventionality of the meaning of 'all this' and the poem's disjunctive phrasal suggestions before it, leaves the reader asking simply 'all' what?

The poem's seeming deficiencies become themselves its most cherished attributes. Its lacks, or *mistakes of readability*, become themselves acts of defiance to normative methods of association and deduction. They offer a parody of past or familiar methods of signification in language, a self-reflexive scepticism of their own language and an aesthetic transcendence to **extra-linguistic areas of reflection and meaning**. Those areas

could perhaps be apparent in the fusion between 'autumnal' (with its seeming symbolization of death) and '(puff, quickly rushes' (with their seeming symbolization of vitality and life) or in the combination between 'consummation' (normally associated with joyful occasions) and 'impossible sorrows'.

Bernstein's poem 'Renumberation' from The Sophist (1987) offers a miniaturized version of both his general signification rationale and its *deep parodic* impulse. Generally speaking, Bernstein's poetry of the 1980s is seen by critics such as Eleana Kim, Roger Gilbert, Geoffrey Treacle and Vernon Shetley respectively as 'concretist, transitional, and temporarily distinct',¹⁴ 'distrusting of pleasure' making his poems 'as unpleasant as possible',¹⁵ and typically as 'disorientating and fragmentary',¹⁶ 'a matter of surfaces', 'arbitrary', offering 'no grounds for choice', 'no goal' to achieve and no 'surprise' for the reader.¹⁷

For Bernstein, however, as he reflects retrospectively on his poetry of that period, his concern was with attempting to 'open up a world of verbal sensations' since 'what is important in poetry' for him 'is not the message, but the style and form and structure'.¹⁸ Yet, as I have attempted to indicate, the message in Bernstein's poetics is itself, to a large extent, his style(s), even when such styles themselves paralogically critique their own implied emphases and strategies. As Pierre Joris puts it in his 'Review of Bernstein's *Rough Trades*' (1991), Bernstein's 'political stance is visible in the language (of his poems) itself' insofar as 'one of the effects of using de- & re-contextualized citations is to challenge the conventions not only of traditional poetic language, but of public speech as well'.¹⁹

¹⁴ Eleana Kim, 'Language Poetry: Dissident Practices and the Makings of a Movement', read me, no. 4 (Spring / Summer, 2001), Internet journal: <http://home.ips.net/~nada/language1.htm>

¹⁵ Roger Gilbert, 'Textured Information: Politics, Pleasure and Poetry in the Eighties', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 33, no. 2 (Summer, 1992), pp. 242-74.

¹⁶ Geoffrey Treacle, 'Review of Bernstein's *Close Listening*', Chicago Review, (Summer / Fall, 1999), p. 198.

¹⁷ Vernon Shetley, After the Death of Poetry (1993), p. 151.

¹⁸ Charles Bernstein, Interviewed by The Seminary Co-op, Bernstein's homepage: <http://www.semcoop.com/fronttable/special.asp?special=specials/bernstein.txt>

¹⁹ Pierre Joris, 'Review of Bernstein's *Rough Trades*', American Book Review, (Feb./March 1993), Internet version: <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/bernstein/reviews/abr-joris.html>

'Renumberation', 1987.

Premises grant feelings
alone to flicker
and tangled
at stands that
float, or rest
on any hung.
Traced in tongue, barer
in most what
pucks aboard
amiss, screening option's
ken, drops point
deposit of vagueness
nearly minded or
clamped.²⁰

Like 'Company Life', this poem starts with a declaration of what seems, at first glance, the authors' own beliefs. 'Premises grant feelings' suggests a strong stand point of view. It comprises a conclusion to an untold story that initially seems both expressive of its poet's textual self and structured in an ordinary, or less experimental, way. Its aphoristic style gives the impression that there is some explanation to follow as to what the poem means by 'premises', how and why do they 'grant feelings', and what kind of feelings do they grant. In short, it represents the kind of normative language-use that Bernstein's poetry typically targets for compositional parody.

We read 'Premises grant feelings' and pass over its grammatical and syntactic regularity as given, expecting the following composition to reveal or explain whatever we think is ambiguous about it. But rather than getting such explanation, we get 'alone to flicker' which is not particularly connected to 'premises grant feelings' nor especially disconnected either, or itself devoid of internal contradictions, but is essentially differential, breaking those expectations of ours to the extent of parodying them. There is not any particular binarity here, but a multiplicity and a differentiability. Bernstein's poetic language is simply more self-aware than usual (conventional and experimental). Attempting to enact its own corresponding beings in conception, it seems to reject linearity and binarity for their false claims to objectivism and reason. And it offers such argument through its formal architecture by demonstrating its own differential and contradictory techniques and meanings; its own attempts

²⁰ Charles Bernstein, *The Sophist*, (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1987), p. 88.

to eliminate 'objective' distances between the method and its aims, the concept and its instances, the way done and the extent to which it is done.

Thus, we are, indeed, surprised, unlike Shetley's suggestions (1993:151) and a lot more pleasantly perhaps than Gilbert indicates (1992:261) on two, possibly three, levels of textual composition simultaneously.²¹ Firstly, on the syntactic architectural level, the phrase 'alone to flicker' by its disseminative structure blends with the highly conventional structure of the phrase 'premises grant feelings' in terms of both grammar and referentiality. Initially, the nouns 'premises' and 'feelings' as well as the verb 'grant' all seem to be used in their original referential capacities, offering a noun – verb – noun configuration that is grammatically and syntactically normative or 'correct'. By contrast 'alone to flicker' contains one possible adjective 'alone' (also an adverb) and one possible noun 'flicker' (also a verb) between which there is a preposition 'to' in the unconventional structure of adjective (possibly adverb) – preposition – noun (possibly verb) making it syntactically and grammatically non-normative or 'incorrect'. The preposition 'to' and the indeterminable syntactic positions of the words 'alone' and 'flicker' make them highly unlikely to be employed for their original referential capacities.

In that sense, as John Palattella's 'Review of The Republics of Reality' (2001) points out, 'Bernstein is an avid experimentalist who strikes out in many directions', but also one whose 'Lower-case "I"' and 'herky – Jerky mix of comedy, philosophy and lyric'²² typifies a partial 'success' in enacting his poetic emphasis on language as 'the socious' (CD:172) and a partial 'failure' to follow what is generally recognized as 'the possibilities of meaningful action' (CD:31) in poetic form. Significantly, Ethan Paquin's review of the same book (2001) suggests, 'he's as much a lyric bard, prose poet, and romantic, as he's an "experimentalist", a "renegade"'.²³

²¹ Significantly, the anonymous retrospective review of Bernstein's poetry of the 1980s and early 1990s collected in his latest poetry book, *The Republics of Reality* (2000), in *The Publisher Weekly's* no. 13, Vol. 247 (March 27th, 2000), p. 72, dubs him 'the most paradoxically controversial and popular, accessible and most difficult' of the Language poets because of his work's 'stuttering intensities', 'attention to spoken language' and 'eye-wink satiric narrative' revealing 'the social codes hiding behind all the poetry's tropes and forms'.

²² John Palattella, 'Microreviews', *Boston Review*, (April / May, 2001), Internet version: <http://bostonreview.mit.edu/BR26.2/contents.html>

²³ Ethan Paquin, 'Microreviews', *Boston Review*, (April / May, 2001), Internet version: <http://bostonreview.mit.edu/BR26.2/contents.html>

The second level of composition on which this textual sequence may appear surprising concerns the sudden movement from one mode of textual juxtaposition; *conventional*: discursive and linear, to another; *experimental*: disjunctive and fragmentary. There seems little or no introduction at all between the regular textual modality of 'premises grant feelings' and the highly irregular one of 'alone to flicker' and its adjacent phrasal sequences to the end of the poem. Bernstein explains this process in the following terms:

The text operates at a level that not only provokes projections by each sentence, but by the sequencing of the sentences (which) suggests lines or paths for them to proceed along. At the same time, circumspection about the nature and meaning of the projections is called forth. The result is both a self-reflectiveness and an intensification of the items / conventions of the social world projected / suggested / provoked. (CD:37) (My Brackets)

In this sense, Bernstein's juxtapositions indicate not only a continuous process of definition and re-definition of one mode of writing by the other, but also as a commentary of one mode of writing on the other, enacted, as it were, by the syntactic architecture itself. That is, a critical reflection of one syntactic form and its conventional social values of conventional order and harmony, by the other's unconventional advocacy of the differential and the multiple, embodied by the act of their blending combinations in the context of the poem.

Some critics such as David Kellog have implied some kind of recognition of this process in terms of a 'fascination with the workings of ordinary language' which, in his view, characterizes Bernstein's early works of the 1980s, as opposed to the 'pugilistic punning through multiple discourses' that characterizes his late poetics of the 1990s.²⁴ But, as we have seen from the examples above, and will continue to see below, Bernstein's 'fascination with ordinary language' and with 'multiple discourses' integrally continues and, ironically, even *increases* in his late poetics of the 1990s. This happens in terms of textual formats specifically designed for stage audience such as a high degree of orality, distinct humour and social satire. Yet, as we shall also see, the *increase* in the orality-based aspects of Bernstein's poetics in his late works of the 1990s is significantly accompanied by the *decrease* in the *density* of his work's textual and contextual designs; what Kallog perceptively defines as the 'philosophical earnestness' (2001: net) of Bernstein's poetics.

²⁴ David Kellog, 'Microreviews', *Boston Review*, (April / May, 2001), Internet version: <http://bostonreview.mit.edu/BR26.2/contents.html>

The third and final level of composition on which Bernstein's signification rationale employs the element of surprise in textual composition is the combination of these two levels simultaneously to define the 'parodic' impulse in his aesthetic. On the one hand, the exact almost measured contrasts between correct and incorrect textual sequences, or between the *takes* and the *mistakes* of linearity and discursiveness; what Nathanson calls 'linguistic collage' (1992:302) and what Shetley misidentifies as 'arbitrariness' (1993:151), underlines the cognitive limitations of these conventional textual and social values' regarding the complexities inherent in language's relationship to thought. On the other hand, it parodies them, at first, by *deliberately* deforming their actual presence (e.g. the indeterminate grammatical and syntactic positions of 'alone' and 'flicker') and then by deforming their effects, playing on our expectations and reading habits which often ask for them.

Despite their unfamiliarity, then, **there is nothing particularly random about the blending effects and the sudden abrupt movements employed in the various levels of Bernstein's textual architecture** particularly in his works of the late 1970s and 1980s. On the contrary, every signification paradox, every syntactic component appears strategically calculated to problematize the positions of its peers within the general context of his poems in order to make *the point* of questioning the normative didactic logic of conventional reading expectations, parodying them, while offering its own para-logic as an alternative (less-authoritative?) order. Ironically, James Sherry, (the Roof Press editor and a close friend to Bernstein) considers Bernstein 'the most assiduous editor I know' because of the meticulous 'editing and re-editing' he practices on his work:

Throughout the time I have known and worked with him, Bernstein has only once showed me an 'unfinished' piece...I have had hours-long discussions with him about the placement of a comma inevitably to be faithful to the text as it came off the typewriter.²⁵

More authoritative perhaps than critics such as Paul Quinn suggests (1999:net), and less democratic than Language poetry's general ideals seem to advocate, the deliberateness and arbitrariness in Bernstein's textual strategies offer both his emphasis on language as the 'material of both thinking and writing' whose 'givenness' is itself 'the givenness of the world' (CD:61-2) and his obvious *distrust* of his own language's capabilities for

²⁵ James Sherry, Letter to editor (September 23rd, 1981), *The Difficulties*: Charles Bernstein's Issue (1982), pp. 43-44.

just self-knowledge and embodiment. As such, his failure is not in offering no 'goal' as Shetley suggests (1993:151), but in achieving some of it, when he insists on offering the readers all the necessary freedom to choose their own. Both Bernstein and Hejinian are similar in this regard, but very different in their respective means. Bernstein's approach, as we have seen, depends on the constitution of many contradictory *micro-completions* of suggestions and meanings, each as visible in its own *borders*, as it is differential in its re-modification and re-contextualization of the others' such as 'Premises grant feelings' and 'alone to flicker'. In Hejinian's case, as the next part will demonstrate, the emphasis is, instead, on deflating those micro borders. At both the levels of the unit of writing and the overall form of the work, Hejinian's poetics, more often than not, *delays* definitions of syntactic *contours* allowing her styles a sort of random axis rotary motion that *fades* rather than finishes or culminates.

However, the signification rationale of Bernstein's early poetics of the 1980s differs slightly from that employed in his late poetics of the 1990s. Not, however, in terms of its representation of 'ordinary language' as Kellogg suggests (2001:net), but on the contrary, in terms of its increased emphasis on it. To be sure, some critics have partially recognized some of this difference. For example, R. D. Pohl comments on what he sees as 'the shift' in Bernstein's poetics 'since the mid-eighties' towards 'recognizably lyrical forms', he argues:

Even if the sense of the poem is complex, disjunctive, and replete with possible meanings, its rhythm and form evoke lyrical feeling... This is not to suggest that his work is any less subversive, however, since the shift seems designed at least in part for comic and satirical purposes. Nor has his syntax become any more specifically referential.²⁶

While Pohl successfully identifies a change in Bernstein's poetics, there is a minor, yet obvious, problem in defining it as both 'lyrical' and 'non-referential' at the same time. *Non-referential*, as opposed to *less-referential*, proposes anonymousness and indeterminism, while *lyricism*, as opposed to *differential* selfhood, proposes egotism and focalized perspectivism. Bernstein's poetics, as I have attempted to demonstrate in the last chapter, is more accurately identifiable, in terms of a fusion between the two poles; with the less-referential and the implicitly and paralogically subjective, rather than with their separable more essentialist forms.

²⁶ R. D. Pohl, 'Review of Bernstein's *Republics of Reality*', *The Buffalo News*, May 7th, 2000, Internet version: <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/bernstein/joris.html>

As such, it is perhaps more practical to suggest that this change from the early to the late stages of Bernstein's poetics is definable in terms of both his signification rationale, as a decorative textual mutation in sentences' length and grammatical integrity, and in terms of his style of textual fragmentation, as a more significant shift from overtly readerly to predominantly performerly poetics. This change is, therefore, primarily in formal aesthetic priorities, rather than in contextual and perceptual methodologies of poetic interaction. In other words, both of Bernstein's phases confirm, as we shall see, his poetics' textual processes of paralogical, *deeply parodic*, *implicitly coherable* and contradictory impulses by different syntactic means and with different readership effects.

More specifically, the first phase of Bernstein's development, from the late 1970s to the late 1980s, is generally characterized by a higher degree of contextual density, short unit of writing (the word or the phrase), illegible phrasal and word structures, abrupt and continuous phrasal movements and more implicit kinds of humour and musicality. As we shall see, the specific designs of these qualities in Bernstein's work offer particular significance to their reception from the page, rather than particularly from the stage, hence; readerly not performerly.

The second phase, from the early 1990s to the present, is generally characterized by verbal legibility and oral tonality, more explicit, satire and humour, use of local accent, more rhythmic musicality, less abrupt phrasal movement, longer and more grammatically complete unit of writing (the phrase or the sentence). Bernstein's use of these qualities offers particular significance to their reception from the stage, rather than from the page, hence; performerly not readerly.

Generally speaking Bernstein's writings of the 1990's attracted more critical attention to their paradoxical syntactic and signification qualities than his earlier poetry of the 1980s and the 1970s. This is not because his early poetics of the 1980s and the 1970s were any less interesting as we have seen, and as Pohl has rightly suggested (2000:net), but most probably, because of the volume and relative publicity that Bernstein's work has been gaining during the past few years.²⁷ Yet, his work's particular transformation from readerly to performerly

²⁷ In his 'Review of Bernstein's *My Way*', in the Internet Journal *LAGNIAPPE*, Vol.1, no. 3 (Summer, 1999), Brian Henry, for example, suggests that 'Bernstein has a distinctive presence on the page as well as in the world of poetry because of his prolificness (twenty books of poetry and two collections of essays), publishers (Sun &

emphases has surprisingly remained almost completely undefined. For example, in its review of Bernstein's *Dark City* (1994), *The Publisher Weekly* (1994) points out that 'Bernstein's world is one of epistemological doubt in the guise of brash conviction'.²⁸ By the same token, Hightower's, Osborn's and Ward's reviews of Bernstein's *My Way* (1999), define it respectively in terms of a mixture of 'sociological, ontological, poetic and banal frequencies',²⁹ 'mischievous informalities, witty digressions, and ludic interludes',³⁰ and consider Bernstein himself a 'comic writer' who 'thrives on paradox' and is 'committed to social change'.³¹

Patricia Monaghan's 'Review of *Dark City*' also highlights this work's 'wild' mixture of 'thought, image, and the grit of the ordinary'³² and, in her 'Review of *My Way*' (1998), she sees Bernstein's poetics 'as a radical vision of language' and an 'egocentric voice'.³³ Paul Quinn's article 'Rattling the Chain of Free Verse' (1999), reviewing both Bernstein's books *Log Rhythms* (1998) and *My Way* (1999), defines Bernstein's work of that period, much like Nathanson's article 'Collage and Pulverization' (1992:302) and Pierre Joris's 'Review of Bernstein's *Rough Trades*' (1993:net) before him, in terms of 'collages of extraordinary range and texture'. Nevertheless, Quinn adds that 'every sentence' in Bernstein's work 'demonstrates that there can only be ways – provisional and plural', arguing that 'liberation from conventional sense' lies in the awareness 'that the world is still to be made'.³⁴

However, in order to demonstrate the dynamics of these changes and ascertain their respective significances in Bernstein's poetics, let us examine two extracts from Bernstein's books *Dark City* (1994) and *My Way* (1999).

Moon, Harvard University, and now University of Chicago Press), and Position (David Gray Professor of Poetry and Letters at Sunny-Buffalo, now locus for those interested in Language Poetry).

²⁸ 'Review of Bernstein's *Dark City*', *The Publisher Weekly* Vol. 241, no. 13 (March 28th, 1994), p. 87.

²⁹ Scott Hightower, 'Review of Bernstein's *My Way*' (1999), p. 86.

³⁰ Andrew Osborn, 'Review of Bernstein's *My Way*' (1999), p. 173.

³¹ Geoff Ward, 'My Way: *Speeches and Poems*, A Review', *Boston Review*, (October / November, 1999), Internet version: <http://bostonreview.mit.edu/BR24.5/ward.html>

³² Patricia Monaghan, 'Review of Bernstein's *Dark City*' (1994), p. 1660.

³³ Patricia Monaghan, 'Review of Bernstein's *My Way*', *Booklist*, Vol. 95, no. 8 (December 15th, 1998), p. 72.

³⁴ Paul Quinn, 'Rattling the Chains of Free Verse' (1999), Internet version: <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/bernstein/joris.html>

Will you promise not to get mad
if I tell you something? Nothing
notable except the prism without
light effects. Except that
expectations stymie hunger for
exceptions, such that
dedication rumples the doily
while in a tugboat there's
too little chance for remorse.
Like pillars of sand at a Revivalist
Meeting or pockets of pumice at a
Pita party. For when the fire chief
told pickles that he could stay
the cat knew he had finally
found a home. Any other solution
would be shallow and unseemly and so
seemingly inconsolable. An
inexorable
float bombarding an quixotic emission,
a fleeting factotum culminating in
gesellschaft.³⁵

'Gertrude and Ludwig's Bogus Adventure', My Way, 1999.

As Billy goes higher all the balloons
Get marooned on the other side of the
Lunar Landscape. The Module's broke –
It seems like for an eternity, but who's
Counting – and Sally's joined the Moonies
So we don't see so much of her anyhow.
Notorious novelty – I'd settle for a good
Cup of Chase & Sand-borne – though when
The strings are broken on the guitar
You can always use it as a coffee table.
Vienna was cold at that time of year.
The sachertorte tasted sweet but the memory
burned in the colon. Get a grip, get a grip, before
The Grippe gets you. Glad to see the picture

³⁵ Charles Bernstein, Dark City (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1994), pp. 49-50.

Of ink – the pitcher that pours before
Throwing the Ball, with never a catcher in sight.
Never a catcher but sometimes a catch, or
A clinch or a clutch or a spoon – never a
Catcher but plenty o’ flack, ‘till we meet
On this side of the tune.³⁶

The two most prominent aspects of Bernstein’s textual strategies of the 1990s by comparison to his early poetics of the 1980s, as the above examples show, are perhaps their tendencies to acknowledge grammatical correctness as the starting point in composition and to utilize longer, or less abrupt, sentences and lines. Most of the poems collected in Dark City (1994), Log Rhythms (1998) and My Way (1999) generally observe the traditional grammatical positions of their chosen vocabulary’s compositional associations as their starting points from which further experimental redefinition usually arise. Unlike ‘Company life’ and most of his poems in Controlling Interests (1980), ‘Renumberation’ and most of his poems in The Sophist (1987), both ‘Locks Without Doors’ and ‘Gertrude and Ludwig’s Bogus Adventure’ observe the completeness of the writing utterances while working at the same time to redefine that completeness and critique it.

For example, while the phrase ‘alone to flicker’ in ‘Renumberation’ is syntactically and grammatically incomplete in terms of all of its component words, similar to ‘(puff quickly rushes’ in ‘Company Life’, sentences like ‘Nothing / notable except the prism without light effects’ in ‘Locks Without Doors’ or ‘Vienna was cold at that time of year’ seem both syntactically and grammatically complete while contextually critical and referentially investigative.

In short, while the textual strategies of Bernstein’s early signification rationale tended to use short bursts of amputated phrasal juxtapositions in his work of the 1980s and late 1970s, it tended to use longer, more complete and less grammatically and syntactically short-breathed sentence juxtapositions in his work of the 1990s contextually acting, more or less, in the same way as the relatively shorter phrases of his early poetics. In other words, the same signification rationale of blending conventional and unconventional, or normative and non-normative, language-uses in composition, re-defining and critiquing the traditionally accepted clarity of conventional syntactic logics by deforming, or rather parodying, their effects is applied in the two examples above. In this sense, as Pohl suggests, ‘his syntax’ has not ‘become any less’ ‘subversive’ than before

³⁶ Charles Bernstein, My Way (1999), p. 109.

(2000:net). However, there is one significant difference. In earlier poems like 'Renumberation' and 'Company Life', the gestural play between contrasting signification effects springs from the phrase, the individual word and sometimes-even from punctuation marks like an open left bracket. By contrast, in later works like 'Locks Without Doors' or 'Gertrude and Ludwig's Bogus Adventure', it springs from complete sentences, which take over the roles of the relatively smaller phrasal units in the earlier poems.

As in 'Renumberation' (1987), for example, the role of the first sentence in 'Locks Without Doors' (1994) seems more a statement of a language-use than a statement. 'Will you promise not to get mad, if I tell you something?' seems uncompromisingly sequential and discursive in structure suggesting a situation of conversational questioning whose answer is seemingly expected to be shocking 'promise not to get mad'. Its adjacent sentence starts with the word 'Nothing' on the same line implying the same sort of sudden movement from conventional to unconventional syntactic compositions employed in both 'Renumberation' and 'Company life' (1980). In effect, the language of Bernstein's late phase has not become any less self-aware or any less driven to embody its own meanings, but rather has become more concerned with practical aesthetic effects such as legibility and grammar.

For example, the second sentence 'Nothing / notable except the prism without / light effects' appears, superficially, to answer the previous question and to continue the conversational mode suggested by the first sentence. Its seeming grammatical and syntactic regularity initially leads the reader into imagining it as a logical progression to the first sentence. Considered more carefully, however, the implications behind the image it depicts 'prism without light effects' and the position of the word 'Nothing' combine to imply a sort of negative answer to the question of the first sentence in the sense that it does not answer it at all, but trivializes or parodies our expectation of it. Its tactical positioning in this particular sequence (deliberately) stalls the conversational mode formed by the question. It leaves the reader wondering: what is the definite relationship between getting 'mad' and the notability of the 'prism', which paradoxically has no 'light effects'?, reminding the reader, as Quinn suggests, that 'the world is still to be made' (1999:net).

The same strategy applies to the relationship between the lack of 'remorse' in 'the tugboat' and 'dedication rumples the doily' or 'expectations stymie hunger for / exceptions' in the same sequence of sentences. As in the case of 'Company life' and 'Renumberation', the disjunctive undetermined syntactic associations and

compositions of the remainder of this section of the poem implicates the conventional structure of the first sentence in a continuous process of definition and redefinition that destabilizes both and parodically reflects on the textual and cultural values implicit in the reader's expectations. Following its attempts to reconstruct its own reality within the kind of consciousness it presents, this strategy provokes readers' collaborative potentials while critiquing their habits of perception. **It is, therefore, paralogical contradictory and parodic. That is, it challenges the rules of perception upon which it could be perceived as legitimate, offers multiple incommensurable suggestions and insinuations along with its denial of ever being responsible for their creation and presents itself as an ironic critique of the binary and the linear.**

The same could almost exactly be said about 'Gertrude and Ludwig's Bogus Adventure' (1999) with one significant exception. This poem introduces, not one, but **two types of deep parody**. The first is offered at the structural level as defined above with regard to Bernstein's signification rationale. The other is offered instead, and unlike Pohl's suggestion of the 'non-referentiality' of Bernstein's syntax (2000:net), at a particularly *referential* level related to the meanings of the imagery and vocabulary employed in the text rather than to the cultural significance of their architectural philosophy. Observed by many critics such as Monaghan (1994:1660), Ward (1999: net), Osborn (1999: 173), Quinn (1999:net), Pohl (2000:net), Hightower (1999:86), Palattella (2001:net), this is a particularly humorous, almost satiric, kind of parody that seems specifically directed toward audience appeal.

The first kind of *deep parody* should perhaps be clear by now in the blending between the conventional register employed by the first two clauses, ending with 'anyhow', and the unconventional syntactic disjunction employed by the remainder of the poem, particularly the sudden movement to 'Notorious novelty – I'd settle for a good / Cup of Chase & Sand-bone – through when / The strings are broken on the guitar / You can always use it as a coffee table'. This blending, as I have attempted to suggest before, is indicative of the process of parodic definition and re-definition, reformation and deformation that characterizes Bernstein's signification rationale.

The second type of *deep parody* is offered by this poem's suggestive domestications of traditionally perceived serious topics such as the Lunar landings in references like 'Moonies' and 'Billy goes higher'. However, this type of satiric *deep parody* functions not only as direct social commentary, or a decorative comic relief, as these

critics and others have concluded. Rather, as we shall see below, it has an influential impact on Bernstein's style of textual fragmentation and is, therefore, functional on many structural levels in the poetics of his work.

2. Style of Textual Fragmentation and *Implicit Coherence*:

The question of why Bernstein's aesthetic advocates a paradoxical technique of writing is not only related to the kind of 'contradictory' (POP:1) or 'paralogical' (PMC:60) signification rationale in which the 'parodic' (POP:124) play of gesture between superficially opposite syntactic methodologies attempts to reflect the complexities of language's relationship to the individual or what Lyotard calls 'the heteromorphous nature of the language games' (PMC:66). But, it is also related to the role that his texts' musicality, humour, performativity and unit of writing play in constituting the poetics of his work's attempts for multi-dimensional re-interpretive associations or its particular type of *implicit coherence*. I have called this role: *Bernstein's style of textual fragmentation*, for it is in the textual means by which differential combinations of these qualities are enacted in the poem, what Bernstein calls 'vagabonding', that the particularity of his poetics' significance is aesthetically and culturally practised. Bernstein himself observes:

My ideas follow each other, but sometimes it is at a distance, and they look toward each other, but with an oblique gaze... My style and my mind both go a vagabonding I mean that my matter should distinguish itself. It shows sufficiently where it changes, where it ends, where [it] begins, where [it] resumes, without interlacing of words, of conjunctions, or connectives introduced for weak or negligent ears, and without glossing myself. (CD:222-23) (My Brackets)

In the last poem 'Gertrude and Ludwig's Bogus Adventure' (1999), for example, performativity, humour, musicality and the unit of Bernstein's (late) writing are not only present as individual qualities characterizing his general poetics, but as specific interactive and inter-influential techniques describing his own styles of textual fragmentation. They are so not only in terms of their own internal relationships within the text, but also in terms of these relationships' attempts to establish a sort of complex freedom from prior inhibitions pertaining to their textual roles and significance in the aesthetic exchange between reader and text. This attempt, however, is considerably mediated by the implied exactness of the syntactic structures; what we may call, after Bernstein's own phraseology, the anti-vagabonding qualities of his work's paradoxical textual architecture.

To that extent, a certain amount of dry *deep parodic* humour can easily be detected in the contrast between the reference to the 'guitar' and the suggestion to 'use it as a coffee table' in 'The strings are broken on the guitar / You can always use it as a coffee table'. Similarly, it is obvious in the contrast between the first impression of the sentence 'Get a grip', usually associated with serious situations, and the remainder of its clause 'get a grip, before / The Grippe gets you', which is clearly satiric and even humorous. Yet, at the same time, the clause also implies and asserts the first kind of *deep parody*. That is, it both represents and critiques the kind of expectations that normally follows the seriousness obvious in the sentence 'get a grip' by deforming or mocking its linguistic methodology of expression; 'before / The Grippe gets you'.

Yet, the musicality implied by both the repetition 'Get a grip, get a grip' and by the sound structure of the whole clause 'Get a grip, get a grip, before / The Grippe gets you' enacts an almost lullaby singing or tonality. As Paul Quinn observes, 'nursery rhymes have a special significance in Bernstein's verse' insofar as they offer 'a reminder that ideology coos at us over the crib and a potential liberation from conventional sense'.³⁷ But more specifically than this, in itself, this musicality dramatically intensifies the humorous satiric connotations of the poems' sequences in terms of their *deep parodic* redefinition of both the normative language uses and their signification expectations.

To be sure, the interaction between musicality and satiric *deep parody*, or rather the *parodic musicality* and humour of this poem, is even more apparent in the last seven lines. Observe, for example, the play of rhyme and pun of words like 'picture', 'pitcher', 'catcher', 'clinch', 'clutch', 'spoon' and 'tune'. Also, for instance, the compelling rhythm of sequences like 'Never a catcher but sometimes a catch', or 'A clinch or a clutch or a spoon – never a / catcher but plenty o'flack, 'till we meet / On this side of the tune'. By the same token, the humorous disjunction between subsequent images like 'glad to see a picture of Ink' and 'the pitcher that pours before / throwing the ball' is also notable. All such play between musically contrasting, punning and satiric effects increases the intensity of the poem's critical parody of the normative uses of language while emphasizing the referential level of the language of the poem as also comic or humorous.

³⁷ Paul Quinn, 'Rattling the Chains of Free Verse' (1999), Internet version: <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/bernstein/joris.html>

The conjunction between satiric humour, high tonality and disjunctive phrasal sequences contribute collectively to offer multiple gestural vectors of signification including the possibility for *implicit coherence* upon which the work may be encountered. Inasmuch as such qualities identify themselves as a collective, or as general elements within the work, they imply the possibility for a similar collective *coherence implicit* in the work's own textual choices (vocabulary, textual tactics) and extending, as such, beyond its suggested or implied parameters.

For example, the repetition in 'Get a grip, get a grip, before / The Grippe gets you' may be seen comically as a sort of stammer, a ridiculing imitation of whatever emotional situation that may inspire such conventional use of language. The punning effect between 'grip' and the Anglo-French 'grippe' (meaning flu in French) reinforces this reading by indicating on the one hand that such a 'grip' is too strong and, on the other, that the emotions implicated in 'get a grip' is simply ridiculous. Combined with its musicality, the repetition 'Get a grip, get a grip, before / The Grippe gets you' forces a reading of a more sombre nature; a systematic tone of childish intonation, both calming and intensifying simultaneously. Intensifying, because of the clarity of the rhythm, and calming because of its regularity in the repetition. This paradoxical combination between humorous satire, high musicality and textual disjunction allows for almost each individual reading to pre-select a dominant tone, or a set of tones, springing from the work's own textual choices. Such a tone would act as some sort of a basis upon which the work's disjunctive elements may be perceived in readership as *coherent*.

For example, if we select the systematic sobriety of lullaby tonality, it may be possible to imagine this poem as dealing symbolically, but satirically (because childish), with certain aspects of the cultural processes of signification in America. In this sense, the poem might be seen to comment on, for instance, the pride taken from, and the importance placed upon, American programmes of space exploration by contrast to the relative neglect by governmental resources toward pressing social issues like public health care; 'all the balloons / Get marooned on the other side of the / Lunar landscape'. Thus the poem would be indicating the irrelevance of such pride to the life-world of the individual; 'I'd settle for a good / Cup of Chase & Sand-borne'. Or, as such, the poem would be attempting to contest the traditionally perceived hype of such programmes; 'The strings are broken on the guitar / You can always use it as a coffee table / Vienna was cold at that time of year', mocking their proclaimed significance by styling it after a children's lullaby: 'Get a grip, get a grip, before / The Grippe gets you'.

By contrast, if we select the humorous dimension combined with the intensifying clarity of the rhythm, we may encounter the work as an outburst of angry statements that define the current social conditions as a 'catch' with 'no catcher'; no winner, and sees the dichotomy between high romantic dreams; 'as Billy goes higher', and practical social dilemmas like homelessness and poverty as unbridgeable; 'all the balloons / Get marooned on the other side of the / lunar landscape' and depressing; 'the memory / burned in the colon'.

Needless to say, the work itself does not in essence pre-select a particular possibility or set of possibilities, 'goal' in Shetley's words (1993:151), defining readership approach to its meanings, but offers such possibilities for the reader as optional opportunities of encounter. It is not, in other words, dependent for its existence as a poem on the readership abilities to connect certain linguistic units in certain perceptual whole(s), but offers them outside its own proposed fluid structures. One could, in essence, totally discount the first and the second readings given above (highlighting the symmetrical sobriety and the intentional clarity of the poem's acoustic gestures consecutively in conjunction with the ironic connotations of childish play) and the poem would principally remain the same. It is in this sense, that the *implicit coherence* of Bernstein's aesthetic informs the role of musicality, humour and, as we shall see, performance in the poetics of his writing, and at the same time define the style of his textual fragmentation.

However, it is also in the actual performance; the public readings, that such levels of contextual signification in Bernstein's work find their ultimate means of interaction with the reader. With the use of tone and pitch, silence and sound, pronunciation and intonation, the musicality, humour and their reference to the works' *deeply parodic* signification structure are enhanced in Bernstein's texts, perhaps, many times over. Diane Ward, for example, observes:

When Charles Bernstein reads his work to an audience, I have the sense, more so than in most cases, that he's a writer reading what he's written. I don't mean that he's especially declaratory in his reading style, but he emphasizes, and he's letting you know what he's discovered. There's an excitement conveyed in this way, an emphasis on process. His work

contains variety and a willingness to experiment with the language's plurality, its many possibilities, and in turn, its tentative qualities.³⁸

Contrary to what Ward suggests, however, there are texts or poems in Bernstein's work, that are more *performerly* than others in the sense that their textual manoeuvres incorporate more audience-orientated elements. For the sake of this argument, let us take two different examples from Bernstein's early and late works in order to show this mutational contrast in his poetics from predominantly readerly to predominantly performerly texts. Here are two extracts from his poems 'Parameters', Islets / Irritations (1983) and 'A Defence of Poetry', My Way (1999).

From 'Parameter', Islets / Irritations, 1983.

Pardon quickly / adroit breeze / argue
tonic / in issue / practical
platoons /
returns slowly / that make
mason isospheres / unheard relief
piston spender
churn enhancement / marking action
/ most delight
hernia multiphase /
marketing reliance / only
meets / bemused curtain / must use
lost to / bend
gaps/ ³⁹

From 'A Defence of Poetry', My Way, 1999.

You say too much lie a streamroller when
we need dental (I;d say jeweller's)
tools.
(I thin youy misinterpret the natuer of
some of the political claims go; not
thematic
interpretatiomn of every
every detail in every peim

³⁸ Diane Ward, 'Tentativity, Some Notes On Charles Bernstein's Style', The Difficulties: Charles Bernstein's Issue (1982), p. 70.

³⁹ Charles Bernstein, Islets / Irritations (New York: Roof, 1983), p. 29.

but an ocitnetation towatd a kind of
textual practice
that you prefer to call "nknnsense but
for political purposes I prefer to call
ideological ! ⁴⁰

For examples, whereas the unit of writing in poems such as 'Parameters', as well as in most of Bernstein's early writings of the eighties (such as 'Sentences My Father Used', 'Matters of Policy', 'The Next Available Place', 'The Head Gets Scald But The Heart Grows Colder', 'Standing Target' from Controlling Interests (1980), 'Like DeCLArationS in a HymIE CEMetARY', 'Micmac', 'Mall (Sunset at Inverness)', 'The Years as Switches', 'Entitlement', 'Renumberation', 'The Last Puritan' from the Sophist (1987), to mention but a few), has been mainly the phrase, the individual word and, sometimes even, the phoneme, the unit of writing for Bernstein's late writings such as 'A Defence of Poetry' and 'Gertrude and Ludwig's Bogus Adventure' both from My Way (1999), as well as for most of the poems collected in Dark City (1994) and in collaborative booklets with illustrations by Susan Bee like Log Rhythms (1998), has been mainly the sentence.

In the two examples above, 'Parameter' employs minimal phrasal input; a *density* of the linguistic materials that allows for maximum readerly output or vice versa; a minimum phrasal output that allows for maximum readerly input. Phrases like '/ that make mason isospheres / unheard relief, piston spender, churn enhancement / marking action / most delight, hernia multiphase/' and individual words like 'gaps/' are not only physically smaller and contextually compact, but their aesthetic resonance is almost entirely designed for contemplation on a page rather than on a stage. That is, to say, they are *undeceiving* in their deliberate fracturing and deformation of conventional poetic language and syntax. But also, they are so in terms of their lack of contextual immediacy, sequential sound clarity and, most of all, the kind of fuller verbal tonality that may allow them a performerly momentum.

By contrast, 'A Defence of Poetry' is characteristically long-breathed, employing sentence, rather than phrasal, structures, fuller verbal tonality, clarity of sound sequences and recognizable social and cultural satire that foregrounds its immediacy for the audience. Sentences like 'You say too much lie a streamroller when / we need dental (I'd say jeweller's) / tools.' are *performerly* not in one but in two complementary ways. Firstly, in

⁴⁰ Charles Bernstein, My Way (1999), p. 1.

terms of their immediacy and clarity, these sentences offer engaging hints of social critique. Note, for example, the comparison between 'dental treatment' and 'Jeweller's tools', or the demand for a public dental care in America; 'we need dental'. Secondly, in terms of their formal design, these sentences encompass decidedly *performerly* attributes. Consider, for example, their comparatively longer systematic pace, their verbal adequacy, their harmonious sequential sounds, their perceivable musical wholesomeness and, most of all, their *sombre*, rather than abrupt, tonality.

To be sure, even the deliberate spelling mistakes and the repetition of certain words, are clear indications of the performance-based textuality characterizing this stage of Bernstein's writing. Miss-spelled words like 'peim' (for poem), 'oeitnetation' (for orientation), 'nknense' (for nonsense), are not intended only for critiquing accepted givens of linguistic transcriptions, but, as such, they are textual representations of *performerly* pronunciations. They are designed for Bernstein's own New York accent and, in this sense, their critical capabilities spring principally from their performance-based presence in the text.

Similarly, repetitions of words like 'every' in 'not / thematic / interpretation of every / every detail in every peim' can only take their aesthetic accentuation (and humorous) potentials in verbal reading. That is, for example, in the change of intonation, pitch and tone given to each repeated version of the word 'every' in performance. In this particular sense, these deliberate repetitions and misspellings are obvious indications of the change from predominantly readerly-based to predominantly *performerly*-based textuality. That is, the change of emphasis in Bernstein's poetics from a definition of performance or orality in writing as simply a 'sanctification of the natural' (CD:44), to one whose component qualities (such as grammatical and verbal fullness, rhythmic musicality, clear social or cultural satire, humour and *deep parody*) are capable tools endowing experimentally significant levels of political and aesthetic signification. In short, this is a change in Bernstein's style of textual fragmentation and politics of form, rather than in his signification rationale or style of self-constitution.

The significance of this change, however, parallels another in Bernstein's ideals between an earlier rejection, and a recent advocacy, of orality in writing on cultural grounds. Let us consider these two quotations from Bernstein's early article 'Stray Straws and Straw Men' (1976) and from his recent book *My Way* (1999):

The sanctification of the natural comes up in terms of 'voice' & has been extended by various excursions into the oral. On the one hand, there is the assumption that poetry matures in the location of "ones' own voice" which as often as not is no more than a consistency of style & representation. "The voice of the poet" is an easy way of contextualizing poetry so that it can be more readily understood (indiscriminately plugged into) as listening to someone talk in their distinctive manner (i.e., listen for the person beyond or underneath the poem); but this theatricalization does not necessarily do the individual poem any service & and has the tendency to reduce the body of a poet's work to little more than personality. (CD:44)

My Way, 1999.

My insistence on the primacy
of the
poem as written was partly a reaction against
the popular notion of poems as merely
scores to be performed... as if
poems were like lyrics on the back of a record album...
I have come to feel
that the idea of the written
document as primary makes for an unwarranted
or anyway unwanted
hierarchy.⁴¹

While orality's inherent interactive qualities with the audience in terms of its political neutrality as a 'sanctification of the natural' are not as inevitable as Bernstein's early rejection of it would have us believe, its intrinsic cultural significance in opposing the 'hierarchy' of the written word is also not as necessarily given as his later advocacy of it suggests. Both attributes, as we have seen, are dependent on the structural necessities of the writing and reading moments themselves, and not on a pre-established 'sanctification' of their intellectual or aesthetic roles.

⁴¹ Charles Bernstein, 'Thelonious Monk and the Performance of Poetry', My Way (1999), p. 18.

More generally still, while poetry's performance necessarily extrapolates the performer's personality (his accent, intonation, body movements) not all its elements are necessarily personal, much less, 'natural'. At the level of the aesthetic atmosphere, performance can generalize these personal attributes themselves by re-contextualizing their significance beyond their direct association with the performer's self-expressiveness. In order to be as particularly confessional as Bernstein suggests, orality's interactive potentials must first be defined not only in congenial textual qualities such as grammatical integrity, clearer social irony and humour, verbal adequacy and a longer or less abrupt unit of writing, but, more significantly, in these qualities' appropriate methods of deployment.

Moreover, the 'hierarchy' that may be implicit in the written forms of art (in the symbolic distance that readers travel to purchase and read a book) as Bernstein's recent ideals suggest, does not automatically disappear with regard to performance. There is still a symbolic distance that exists between the audience and the stage. More specifically, Bernstein's early opposition to orality reflected by his work's *then* primarily *readerly* designs constituted an important part of Language poetry's more comprehensive critique of what Bernstein terms 'the official verse culture' (AP:6), the 'poetics of identity' in Perelman's terms (MOP:36) or the 'speech-based poetics' in Silliman's (1986:16). Bernstein's later advocacy of performance as an opposition to the 'hierarchy' of the written word, is theorized by him, as the above quotation indicates, simply as a continuation of this theoretical tendency in Language poetry toward more open textual interaction with the reader.

This, as we have seen, is not necessarily the case. The openness of his textual designs still depends on their capacity to enact their own perceptual points of emphasis on the fluid nature of meaning, even with their more appealing performerly registers. They have not become suddenly more 'absorptive', or even 'anti-absorptive' (AP:23), to borrow some of Bernstein's favoured terminologies, just because their oral qualities have somewhat increased. Hejinian's work, for example, as we shall see, mainly does not highlight performance as a necessary part of her work's communicative role. Yet, to that extent, her emphasis on 'bringing the act into the public space' (LOI:35) seems equally re-definable in terms of her predominantly *readerly* textuality.

This, of course, does not mean to downplay the poetic and cultural significance of these poets' research as it makes apparent the kind of complex conceptual grammar needed for a better understanding of their poetics. On the contrary, it is meant to reaffirm the particular suitability of our proposed grammar for this task. That is, to

suggest, as I have argued throughout this thesis, that Hejinian's and Bernstein's respective poetics work in accordance with different perceptual norms (paralogy rather than invention, *implicit* rather than explicit *coherence*, *deep* rather than overt *parody*, contradiction as the *multiple* rather than the binary, the sublime rather than the beautiful) highlighting the interdependent qualities of language, consciousness and reality as their primary subject matters. And as we shall see in the following chapters, Bernstein and Hejinian, additionally, offer their own individual re-formulations of the sublime as one of the most significant areas of postmodern aesthetics.

Chapter Six

Mistakes of Sensibility:

Bernstein and The Postmodern Sublime

Considered in terms of the critics' suggestions, the aesthetic effects of Bernstein's poetics vary dramatically from the overtly negative to the decidedly positive. At one end of the spectrum, critics such as Richard Kostelanetz, in his article 'Picketing the Zeitgeist' (2000), identify Bernstein's poetics as 'a club' with a 'fascist strategy' of exclusion and 'a good deal of deceit'.¹ At the other end of the spectrum, critics such as Timothy Yu define Bernstein's aesthetics in terms of 'disruptions' and 'unveilings' of the 'mainstream poetics and politics' in America at large.²

Yet, critics such as Keith Tuma, in his article 'Contemporary American Poetry and The Pseudo Avant-Garde' (1998), question Bernstein's aesthetic as a possible 'alternative to mainstream poetry' to start with and, more generally, suggest his poems to be 'as disposable as those several discourses' he and his fellow Language poets 'criticize'.³ By contrast, Alan Golding argues, still as generally, that the poetics of Language poets such as Bernstein and Hejinian 'attest to the ongoing life not so much of "the" avant-garde as of various intersecting avant-gardes in American poetry, apparently active in practice even if dead in theory'.⁴ Similarly, Vernon Shetley's book After the Death Of Poetry (1993) considers Language writing 'a revival of an earlier mode of avant-gardism' although criticizes it as 'too easy to write' and 'to read', and, ultimately, as a 'polysemy' rather than 'an achievement'.⁵

Despite their almost uncanny ability to avoid the aesthetic and cultural questions implicated in the poetics of both Bernstein and Hejinian (e.g. the relationship between language, consciousness and reality, the role of the self in this relationship and the function of form in its representation), such critical perspectives seem, indeed, very useful in pointing out the suggestive critical diversity offered by their work. However, closer examinations of Bernstein's poetics by critics such as Peter Nicholas and Geoff Ward reveal some of the more specific aspects

¹ Richard Kostelanetz, 'Picketing the Zeitgeist', American Book Review, Vol. 21, no. 4 (June, 2000), pp. 3-4.

² Timothy Yu, 'Form and Identity in Language Poetry and Asian American Poetry', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 41, no. 3 (Fall, 2000), pp. 422- 61.

³ Keith Tuma, 'Contemporary American Poetry and The Pseudo Avant-Garde', Chicago Review, Vol. 36, no. 3 / 4 (Summer/ Fall, 1998), pp. 43-51.

⁴ Alan Golding, 'Review of Linda Reinfeld's *Language Poetry: Writing as Rescue*', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 35, no. 1 (Spring, 1994), pp. 156-71.

⁵ Vernon Shetley, After the Death of Poetry (1993), pp. 137-51.

of his poetics, such as its emphasis on multiplicity of meanings, its complex concept of language as the medium of social exchange as well as its ironic and political registers.

Arguing that Bernstein's writings represent 'the allegedly second-order experience of "re-cognition" and accepts nothing but itself by which to measure its own accuracy', Peter Nicholas's article 'John Ashbery and Language Poetry' (2000) considers Bernstein's 'paradoxical' aesthetic in terms of what he calls a 'linguistic opacity' utilized to establish 'commonness in language'.⁶ Along the same lines of suggestions, Geoff Ward's 'Before and After Language' (2000) observes that in Bernstein's poetics 'irony is ... not a self-defensive posture into which the voice of the poem can retreat, pre-empting attack, but rather a division, or duplicity of tonal approach which reminds that we are capable of thinking in contradiction'.⁷

Perhaps the most significant attempts to answer to the kind of aesthetics Bernstein's work offers have been conducted by Polish critics Jerzy Kutnik and Antoine Cazé in their respective articles 'Postmodern Language-Centred Writing' (1996) and 'Form as Freedom in the Poetry of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Group' (1988). Cazé, for example, argues for 'the parodic, ironic and ultimately comic nature' of what he calls the 'formalism' of the poetics of Language writers such as Bernstein and Hejinian in terms of their 'denunciation of false logic, glossy and glib argumentation'.⁸ Jerzy Kutnik, in his turn, observes how Bernstein's poetics attempts to 'affect the way we understand social and physical reality' in order to show that 'the form of discourse affects what can be said within it'.⁹

However, as is perhaps clear from these insights, the question of what kind of aesthetic effects Bernstein's poetics aspires after, despite its investigative, ironic and paradoxical registers, or rather because of them, as well

⁶ Peter Nicholas, 'John Ashbery and Language Poetry' in Poetry and the Sense of Panic: Critical Essays on Elizabeth Bishop and John Ashbery, Lionel Kelly (ed.), (Amsterdam & Atlanta: Coterus New Series, Rodopi Press, 2000), pp. 155-67.

⁷ Geoff Ward, 'Before and After Language: The New American Poetry' in Poetry and the Sense of Panic (2000), pp. 169-81.

⁸ Antoine Cazé, 'Form as Freedom in the Poetry of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Group' in Freedom and Form: Essays in Contemporary American Poetry, Esther Giger and Agnieszka Salska (eds.), (Łódź, Poland: University of Łódź Press, 1988), pp. 52-66.

⁹ Jerzy Kutnik, 'Postmodern Language-Centred Writing and the Question of Ideology: A Polish Perspective' (1996), pp. 3-13.

as the textual and contextual mechanisms by which it wishes to accomplish such effects, remain largely undefined by the seemingly more pressing need to emphasize the political dimensions of his work. This chapter's approach will attempt to formulate a more specific answer to that question, continuing the previous chapters' analyses of the conceptual and aesthetic effects offered by the textual dynamics of Bernstein's poems themselves.

I have started this part of the thesis by suggesting that many aspects of Bernstein's work search not for representations of 'true' linguistic experiences but for enactments of 'just' ones in the sense that they attempt to *practically embody*, rather than emotionally authenticate, their conception of the complexity of what meaning is and how it emerges in poetry. I have also attempted to indicate that the poetics of his writing generally contest the linguistic conditions of 'word-ability' upon which their own existence depends by testing (and blending) various conventional and experimental linguistic formats and formulations, and that his work aspires after disappearance not as invisibility but as freedom considered as a search for extra-linguistic meaning.

It is perhaps more accurate, in this stage of our discussion, to add to each of the dimensions that comprise this suggestion an aesthetically perfectionist or *absolutist* impulse by arguing that Bernstein's work searches in presentation for 'absolutely' *just* aesthetic enactments of his meaning experiences, driven by a similarly absolutist quest for textual representational *freedom*, for which it consequently aspires to similarly 'absolute' *unword-ability* in language. But, because it 'accepts nothing but itself' as the measure for 'its own accuracy' as Peter Nicholas rightly observes (2000:156), it almost always manifests its conflicts in the voids between its aspirations after summoning the absolute, even as it ironizes it, and the failures it knows it has to endure in attempting to approach it. This is a driving force in Bernstein's predominantly *playful* aesthetic that urges its continuation in many possibilities of textual and contextual dynamics, effects and formulations.

It is in this sense, for example, that his style of poetic-self constitution employs a continuous process of de-narrativization and re-narrativization, mixing many possibilities of identification and misidentification searching for just representations of that self. His signification rationale, similarly tests a variety of gestural suggestions and associations in contradictory textuality searching in contours of the words' normative signification wells for an embodiment of its own utopian ambition for freedom. It is also in this sense, that Bernstein's style of textual fragmentation employs many paradoxical combinations of qualities such as humour, musicality, satire, *deep*

parody and orality insisting on its *implicit coherence* as an attempt to break free from the limits of what is attainable in perception to the wider limits of what is conceivable by imagination.

However, in the ultimate destination of Bernstein's aesthetic, what does this search for absolute un-word-ability, freedom and representational justice signify? Firstly, it signifies a basic disbelief in an empirical reality; what Lyotard calls 'objective reality' (PMC:73) (LAS:22) and what Jerzy Kutnik sees as an attempt to 'affect the way we understand social and physical reality'.¹⁰ Jerome McGann also helpfully points out that 'the critique of fixed orders 'reality''' in Bernstein's aesthetic is accompanied by 'the deployment of new orders and "realities"'.¹¹

Secondly, this search signifies a basic 'conflict between the faculties of the subject: the faculty to conceive of something and the faculty to present something' (PMC:77). That is, an attempt to find by imagination an instance of an object (the faculty to present) which 'might come to match' what is conceived in perception (the faculty to conceive) effecting the combination of 'pleasure and pain' that Lyotard defines as 'the sentiment of the sublime' (PMC:79). However, in order to demonstrate how this process of 'sublime' communication springs from the various textual strategies and rationales of Bernstein's poetics as described in the previous two chapters, let us examine one last example of his work, namely this excerpt from his poem 'Reading The Tree: 2', Rough Trades (1991).

The part plots a spindle but the
true scales wattle off the clock.
At at which pops as someone
nodules quarts, wholly non-check
slowdown. Bend nothing & nothing
will bend you, jam the gorge
astride the loom, black-away to
tending send. A single everything
points: the mud of bulk, tonal
belief, perfect compassion. &
graciously pissed (oh Hannah !) ;
acting like a typical male
chauvinist pigsty. Nothing
comes quickly, too nervous,
bulb which whose, you thought,
screened bottom (I likes my

¹⁰ Jerzy Kutnik, 'Postmodern Language-Centred Writing' (1996), p. 3.

¹¹ Jerome McGann, 'Contemporary Poetry, Alternate Routes', (1978), pp. 646-47.

repeated stupid) across (don't
complete) sent(i)ence. That's all
a silhouette for obedience, the
oilcloth cuffs quip, maybe
accuses the whole world of his
darkness. You seem unable to
understand that (pygmy whitemeat):
drooping as texture, each embody
dynamite *bluntesse*, puffing
lint wheels syllabary to
tea cakes. OK? Monotonous
agitations thrown across spent
bonbons. Well well well well. ¹²

Like in many of Bernstein's poems, as Susan M. Schultz observes in her article 'Postmodern Promos' (2000), this poem's vocabulary and phrasal compositions appear, at first glance, "foreign" – alien, confusing, and above all, never sacred'.¹³ Considered more carefully, however, this poem appears compounded with possibilities for rich aesthetic meanings. Every poetic aspect we have defined so far in Bernstein's work is represented here in some way or another.

Firstly, Bernstein's paralogical and contradictory poetic self is apparent in the blending of conventional self-presence in phrases like 'I likes my repeated stupid' and 'Bend nothing and nothing will bend you', and unconventional deflation and redefinition of this poetic self-presence in phrases like 'wholly non-check slowdown', 'jam the gorge', 'screened bottom' and 'across (don't complete) sent(i)ence', offering many possibilities as to the final form of that self.

Secondly, Bernstein's *deeply parodic* (because paralogical and contradictory) signification rationale is apparent in the sequences' and the phrases' emphases on non-linearity as a principle. Such sequence as 'At at which pops as someone nodules quarts', 'wholly non-check slowdown', 'Bend nothing and nothing will bend you', 'jam the gorge, astride the loom', 'A single everything / points: the mud of bulk, tonal / belief', confirms these qualities. The reader is left wondering; how can there be a 'single' 'everything', what kind of 'bulk' that would have

¹² Charles Bernstein, *Rough Trades* (1991), p. 35.

¹³ Susan M. Schultz, 'Postmodern Promos' (1999), Internet version:
http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/schultz/a_poetics.html

'mud' and what kind of 'belief' that would necessarily be 'tonal'? What does the repetition of 'At at' refer to; what kind of 'quarts' which someone would 'nodule'?

While the poem gives no clues as to the answers of these questions, it offers them paralogically rather than accumulatively. Sentences like 'jam the gorge', 'astride the loom', for example, are not necessarily disjunctive or conjunctive in a linear way. Rather they are basically differential, misaligned on all three normative axes simultaneously, while rejecting none of them explicitly. These sentences are both: contradictory, because they offer multiple incommensurable suggestions and, paralogical; because they are continuous and discontinuous with the rules of the perception they are attempting to modify and appeal to for recognition. Even the grammatical position of words like 'loom' in the phrasal context of this sequence is not stable. Is it a 'noun', such as 'gorge', or is it a 'verb', such as 'wattle' in 'wattle off the clock', or is it instead both a noun and a verb like perhaps 'send' in 'tending send'?

In such a signification environment, conventionally structured sentences like 'bend nothing and nothing will bend you' seem simply ridiculous in the sense that its conventionality becomes in itself a sort mystifying clarity whose presence seems more an oddity than normality. This is not only because its adjacent phrasal sequences *bend* conventional rules of writing, but because it is also directed by an on-going process of contextual redefinition in which its apparently stable structure cannot endure unchanged. In this way, this sentence's apparently conventional language-use is parodied gesturally, by the type of phrasal dialectics surrounding it, and re-defined continually by the level of differentiability it embodies within the contrasting effects that characterize the whole composition.

Here, Bernstein's signification rationale typifies the 'conflict between the faculties of the subject' 'the faculty to conceive' and 'the faculty to present' with which Lyotard defines his concept of the 'sublime' (PMC:77). We read phrases like 'wholly non-check slowdown' and we may know there is something that is conceivable, almost there. Something, however, that is semantically slippery, and ultimately ungraspable. Conception, on the one hand, (both that implied by the text, and ours) attests that the meanings attempted are possible abstractedly. Envisioning the impending success of imagination in apprehending or seizing those meanings in words, we feel pleasure, and with Bernstein's particular playful tones, we may even feel amusement. However, when imagination (both that implied by text and ours) fails to present the right words, the right instances, the right

objects, that may accurately depict those meanings, we feel frustration and pain. As Lyotard argues, 'every presentation destined to make visible' that which we have conceived of 'appears to us painfully inadequate' (PMC:78). It is then the combination of 'pleasure and pain'; 'the pleasure that reason should exceed all presentation, the pain that imagination or sensibility should not be equal to the concept' (PMC:81).

This continuous process of examination and re-examination in which Bernstein's aesthetics destabilizes stable forms of meanings partially indicates another aspect of Lyotard's concept of the postmodern 'sublime'. That is, its search for what he calls 'the without form' (LAS:58) or the 'limitless' (LAS:24-55). It does so in terms of both the kind of meanings associable with its poetic-self; diegetic and representational, and the kind of meanings associable with its investigation into language's complex relationship to consciousness; differential and open.

For example, by presenting themselves in this multi-dialectical way, phrases like 'A single everything points', 'too nervous bulb which whose' and 'the oilcloth cuffs quip', attempt to offer 'in presentation itself' (PMC:81) *the impossibility of presentation*, or their aspiration after formlessness. Yet, they do have a form, at least a physical one, and do present something, though not completely. In their attempt to reach their ultimate potential in presentation, they paradoxically reveal their partial deficiency, their partial failure, making that very failure itself; that very *mistake in sensibility*, into their final presentation of the 'unpresentable' or its 'negative presentation' (PMC:78) as Lyotard puts it. As such, they attempt to show by this *play* with failure, both their struggle to reach absolute 'freedom' from, and, therefore, 'justice' in, embodying the experiences of meaning in the world, and, even more paradoxically, their 'parodic' critique of the general failure of conventional language usage to do so.

Bernstein's style of textual fragmentation reinforces this reading in terms of his blending of individual textual qualities. Those qualities, to be sure, are easily identifiable in this poem. We can see, for example, his uses of undetermined grammatical positions, such as 'blub which whose', his humorous satiric commentary such as 'Monotonous agitations thrown across spent bonbons', or the double-edged sarcasm in 'you seem unable to understand'. Similarly notable is Bernstein's employment of explicit performativity textuality such as 'Ok' or 'Well, well, well, well', or his tactic of juxtaposing seemingly contrasting phrasal compositions such as 'dynamite bluntesse' and word fragments such as 'sent(i)ence', or the general high tonality of the work.

There are three distinct levels of aesthetic signification these qualities connote, both textually and contextually. Firstly, on the level of the works' own unit of writing (the phrase in this case). These qualities connote the *multiple* levels of signification upon which each of them inspire its own differential suggestions and insinuations, in simultaneous conjunction and disjunction with one another, hence the diversity of critical receptions we have flagged above. For example, the double edged satire implied by 'you seem unable to understand' in the sentence 'you seem unable to understand that (pygmy whitemeat)' involve both the actual reader of the text, as a direct commentary on her habits of conventional readerly expectations, and the sentence's own conventional structural state, as objects for *deep parody*.

The first half of the sentence seems to implicate the conventional reader who, most probably, will not wholly understand the effects this kind of poetry seeks to achieve, as well as represent him or her by its conventional structure. The second half, however, (pygmy whitemeat) serves, by its seeming irrelevance and definite adjacency, to both critique this type of language use, and ironize it. In the context of the whole poem, the sentence itself becomes satiric and parodic according to the suggestions inspired by various combinations of poetic qualities whose selection lie paradoxically, in the very act of readership it attempts to critique and modify. This is perhaps what Peter Nichols has commented on earlier as the paradox of 'linguistic opacity' and emphasis on 'commonness in language' in Bernstein's poetics (2000:167).

However, the degree of suggestive signification chosen by the reader in a single instance of readership within this array of effects is, in this case, responsible for the specific meanings inspired. The reader, for example, may choose the double-edged sarcastic and parodic play in sentences like 'You seem unable to understand' as a source for humorous fun and pleasure, or the textual orality in phrases like 'well, well, well, well' as a means for affinity and direct attachment with the poem, or the social irony and critique in sentences like 'Monotonous agitations thrown across spent baboons' as a more serious partially painful criticism of contemporary political practices. By the same token, the reader may select the fragmentary intensities of lines like 'drooping as texture, each embody / dynamite *blurtesse* puffing / lint wheels syllabary to / tea cakes' as an embodiment of the paralogy inherent in the process of meaning, from which the reader can derive both the pleasure of conception (or the possibility of conception) and the pain of these lines' inadequacy to accurately represent what is being conceived of.

The second level of aesthetic significance involves the whole work not as a unit but as a gravitational singularity attracting various signification energies from outside its over-ambitious position of limitlessness. That is, such textual qualities as those defined above work together in a *multiplicity of differential* combinations to attract coherable signification units that may be applicable to the work itself. This is not to imply that these qualities provide specific clues to unlock these units of meaning, but rather to suggest that their generality inspires such clues' potentiality.

For example, the blending tactics in 'A single everything', combined with the type of satire in 'you seem unable to understand' may suggest a unit of meaning in which the work as whole may be interpreted as one of extreme political anger; a disbelief in the current cultural value systems. By the same token, a combination between the indeterminated grammatical or contextual positions in phrases like '(I likes my repeated stupid)', or 'too nervous bulb which whose', or 'black-away to tending send' on the one hand, and the rough, almost knee-jerk abruptness of the phrasal architecture of this section of the poem on the other, may inspire a unit of meaning in which the whole work might be seen as a sort of representation of absurdity. That is, the work might be seen to structurally embody a sort of laughter on arguably dominant poetic and cultural conditions such as the discursive norms of understanding, paradoxically implying a certain degree of authority and a claim to knowledge.

However, the third and final level of aesthetic signification involves both previous levels, the level of the unit of writing and the level of the work as a whole, concomitantly. When both levels combine; the referential level (comic, satirical and ultimately *playful*) and the gestural level (multiple, incommensurable and ultimately painful), possibilities of signification considerably multiply. Accordingly, the meaning of these possibilities' collective presence becomes one of extreme variety, in a partially familiar, but predominantly unfamiliar, orchestration of partially amusing and gratifying effects and partially disorientating conclusions, and in Lyotard's terms 'painful' and 'sublime' meanings (PMC:77). As such, each suggested, perceived form, revealed or inspired, becomes itself a representation of its own ambition for limitless forms offering a sign for the conflict between the subjective faculties of conception and presentation, imagination and apprehension, in their attempts for the 'absolute', be it with regard to *formal* freedom, justice, or un-word-ability.

Here then we encounter Bernstein's masterly presentations of a *playful* and partially naïve or *popular* 'sublime' which at the same time address a certain philosophical *politics* of the word. For Bernstein, as he himself acknowledges, 'Language is limitation':

So it always seems ironic to hear someone say, well I am not interested in aesthetic issues, I am interested in emotion, or life, since if you can attend to the writing in the right way these so-called aesthetic issues ... become investigations into the possibilities of and the realizations of communicating or acting or being in the world... Everything is contained when it is apprehended; language is limitation. One sees certain things, or constructs them. And a limit is just the measure at hand. (CD:406)

Here then lies the significance of Bernstein's aesthetic. Culturally speaking, it is one of philosophical 'paralogy' (PMC:60), 'contradiction' (POP:1), *implicit coherence* and playful *deep parody* which partially questions the givens of textual and societal value systems and conditions, and partially questions its own. It invests its destabilizing and investigative textual rationales in its readers' abilities to share its proposed reality, and its conceptual givens, critiquing the authority of the mediums it challenges, with the authority of the mediums it suggests. Aesthetically speaking, Bernstein's aesthetic is one of the 'sublime', which attempts to reflect the profound complexities of language's differential relationship to the individual in the world. Working in accordance to the 'conflict between the faculties of the subject' (PMC:77), it effects sensations of 'pleasure and pain', with one foot in the world of *satirical play* and *humorous pleasure*, searching for unrepresentable meanings of absolute freedom, un-word-ability and linguistic representational justice.

Part Three

Lyn Hejinian and the Poetry of Challenge

Chapter Seven: Beyond Autobiography: Hejinian's
 Signification Rationale

Chapter Eight: Hejinian's Self and Textuality

Chapter Nine : Hejinian's Sublime Poetics

*Continuous quantities, like continuous qualities,
are endless like the truth, for it is impossible
to carry them. Lyn Hejinian 1978¹*

¹ Lyn Hejinian, Preface to Writing Is an Aid to Memory (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1996), first published by (New York: The Figures, 1987), un-paginated.

The following discussion of Hejinian's poetics has four main concerns. Firstly, it will attempt to define the ways in which the significance of her aesthetics can best be identified by use of this thesis's conceptual grammar as defined in part 1. Secondly, it will attempt to re-define the particularity of Hejinian's poetics, still more precisely, by comparison to Bernstein's in terms of six main areas of poetic and cultural relevance:

1. Their poetics' general concepts of language and self.
2. Their aesthetics' individual conceptualizations of the cultural roles of the reader and the writer.
3. Their individual uses of textual strategies such as *implicit coherence* and *deep parody*.
4. The functions of humour, musicality, unit of writing, grammar, sequence, vocabulary and performativity in their respective poetics.
5. The kinds of signification rationales they each predominantly deploy.
6. The resultant forms of 'sublime' effects their respective poetics usually produce.

Thirdly, the following chapters will attempt to re-define Hejinian's poetics beyond both its popular critical considerations as postmodern autobiography (Perloff:1985&1991, Davidson:1989, Clark:1991, Dworkin:1995, Spahr:1996, Samuels:1997) and its less popular considerations as an assortment of principally disintegrable poetic matters (Abbott:1982, Bernnan:1991, Cazé:1998). While highlighting the many useful suggestions of these considerations, I will, nevertheless, argue that Hejinian's poetics elaborates much more flexible and complex processes of cultural and aesthetic signification than usually identified by them. Finally, the following discussion will attempt to define, in detail, the particular textual and contextual strategies participating in the materialization processes of these aspects in Hejinian's work. I will start by redefining our two main parameters; language and self, for Hejinian's particular poetics.

If it is true, as the last part has attempted to show, that Bernstein's poetics conceives of language as a series of tentative limitations, Hejinian's, as the following part will attempt to show, conceives of it as a series of tentative continuities. As such, while Bernstein's textual concept of language materializes in terms of a certain number of inter-dependent micro-completions; definitions and re-definitions, Hejinian's emerges in terms of a state of continuous constitution; being through time, or, the meaning of continuity. Commenting retrospectively on her works Writing Is an Aid to Memory (1978) and My Life (1980) & (1987), in her theoretical book The Language of Inquiry (2000), Hejinian writes:

In that work I attempted to explore some epistemological relationships that hold time to language and language to time. This is an area that continued to fascinate me, and I took up the problem again when writing *My Life* (the book that followed *Writing Is an Aid to Memory*), but while in *My Life* I was interested in posing sentences and blocks of sentences (paragraphs) as units of time, in *Writing Is an Aid to Memory* I was working in a mode that was more elemental, more obviously (and more radically) materialist, and my interest was in building time. I wanted to release the flow of accumulated time in syntax and thereby to make time happen. Obversely, I wanted to release the flow of accumulated syntax in time and thereby make sentences (and their concomitant thought) happen. (LOI:22)

As such, language, for Hejinian has a symbiotic relationship to *time* both aesthetically and culturally.² From an aesthetic point of view, language's 'epistemological' capacity cannot take place without *the continuity* implied by the passage of time as a necessary attribute in its acts of signification and communication. In her article 'Language and Paradise' (1985) Hejinian writes:

Time is the violent element that can make spatial configurations appear irrational. It severs, disjoins, postpones, even as it enumerates, even as it makes things count. Time sets the conditions for the surge of desire – whether erotic or epistemological. (LOI:72)

And from a philosophical, or more cultural, point of view, Hejinian's poetics suggests that *the continuity* implied by the meaning of time, in relation to linguistic signification, identifies and asserts the *historical* dimension of existence in the individual's consciousness of the world. Commenting on the ways in which the principle of continuity; what she calls 'the nonisolability of objects and events in the world', defines her poetic approach in terms of both its *isolatable* moments of meaning closures; what she terms 'temporal pressure', and

² Our discussion of Hejinian's aesthetic in terms of what this thesis calls 'the meaning of continuity or being through time' does not attempt to account for the philosophical interpretations of 'being' and 'time' in Heidegger's Philosophy. Rather, our use of these terms draws upon their conceptual particularity to Hejinian's own ontological concepts of the world as offered by her work. Heidegger himself underlines the importance of these concepts to this sort of aesthetic inquiry:

All ontology, no matter how rich and tightly knit a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains fundamentally blind, and perverts its innermost intent, if it had not previously clarified the meaning of being sufficiently, and grasped this clarification as its fundamental task.

- Time and Being: A Translation of *Sein und Zeit*, Joan Stambaugh (trans.), (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 9.

its emphasis on the poem 'as the site of the consciousness of perception' in which the element of time plays a pivotal role, Hejinian's same article suggests:

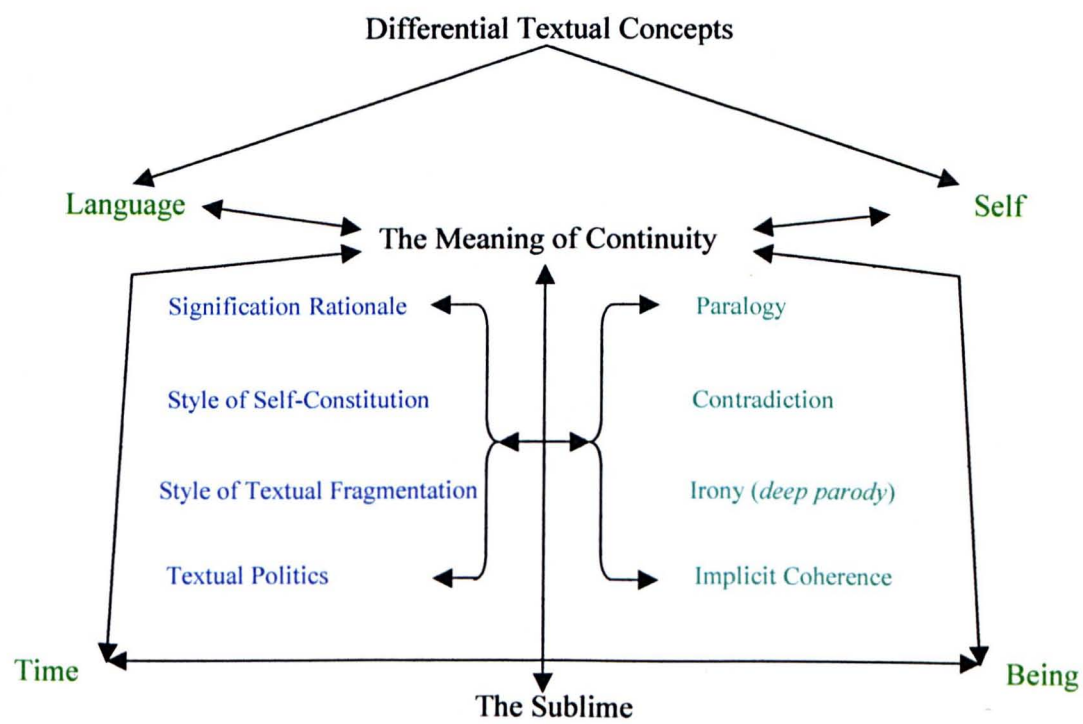
Despite an analytic or investigatory impulse underlying my writing generally, I am keenly aware of the nonisolability of objects and events in the world, our experience of them, and our experience of that experience... I have focused on perception and on the language that serves as its site – or, more specifically, on the poem as the site of the consciousness of perception. At points where temporality is dominant in a work, it exerts a particular pressure... and one's response is likely to include restlessness and sometimes anxiety. Time challenges the span of the self, and for that reason a sense of temporal pressure in and on a work can serve as an incitement to activity. (LOI:67)

Hejinian's textual concept of language as is her concept of self is more or less defined in her poetics as an entanglement of the meaning of continuity (being through time) within the processes of consciousness in which linguistic signification takes place. Accordingly, what the last chapter has discussed in terms of Bernstein's poetics as definable within the parameters of language and self alone, the following chapters will discuss in terms of Hejinian's poetics as definable within the parameters of the language / time, Self / being symbioses. By the language / time, Self / being symbioses, I therefore mean, the conceptual and technical elements composing the principle of continuity in Hejinian's various textual and contextual strategies and procedures such as her styles of self constitution, her general politics of form, her signification rationale, her style of textual fragmentation, as well as her poetics' general aesthetic leitmotifs and effects.

For example, Bernstein's poetic-self, as we have seen, is paralogic inasmuch as each of the differential sides of its materialization in the language of his texts seems fairly dialectic or clear. Hejinian's, by contrast, is also paralogic, but because such sides of its presentation are instead quite extra-dialectic, or intrinsically not clear. Its textual contours, as we shall see, generally remain in a continuous state of *attempting to be*. For Hejinian, 'language gives structure to awareness. And in doing so, it blurs, and perhaps even effaces, the distinction between subject and object, since language is neither, being intermediate between the two' (LOI:23). However, Hejinian's ideals occasionally take these leitmotifs to an extreme by suggesting their 'infinite' 'openness':

Indeed, the conjunction of *form* with radical *openness* may be what can offer a version of the "paradise" for which writing often yearns – a flowering focus on a distinct infinity. (LOI:42)

Significantly, as we shall also see, Hejinian’s work does not always offer the kind of ‘radical openness’ her ideals call for, particularly with regard to the dimension of memory in the meanings her texts often offer. Neither does it always enact her idealistic separation between the material and the gestural dimensions of form. But rather, Hejinian’s poetics usually offers momentary signification closures; what she calls ‘temporal pressure’ (LOI:67), within its own kinds of emphases on readers’ collaboration, both by the detached or descriptive aspects of her poetic textuality and by her signature strategies of meaning incompleteness and continuation in which these descriptions appear. As such, Hejinian’s aesthetic presents itself as a series of paradoxical *challenges* rather than one of *mistakes*. Her textual concept of language is *challenging* for absorption based on temporal stability or conventionally structured meanings. It highlights issues of containment (or coherence), rhetoric (and habits of perception), and is simultaneously related to Hejinian’s textual understanding of the meaning of *time*. Similarly, her poetic concept of self is *challenged* for presentation, compelled for it and paradoxically also resistant to it. As such, it involves issues of identification, formability and technical textuality, and is simultaneously related to Hejinian’s poetic understanding of the meaning of continuity (being through time) in its relationship to both the parameters of language and self. The following diagram may best summarize this chapter’s conceptual approach as defined above:



Chapter Seven

Beyond Autobiography:

Hejinian's Signification Rationale

The question of generic identity has occupied, perhaps, the foremost-explored curiosity in the critical reception of Hejinian's work. It, therefore, offers a plausible, if not a necessary, starting point for our reading of her poetics. Generally speaking, this critical reception, particularly of her two most acknowledged volumes Writing Is an Aid to Memory (1978) and My Life (1980) & (1987), offers two major tendencies. The paragraphs below discuss them consecutively, rather than concomitantly, so as to avoid separating our definition of each, from the critical views that comprise it.

The first of these tendencies concentrates on the *internal implicit coherence* offered by Hejinian's signification rationale, or – *the visible hints of possible connection implied by her choice of the words, phrases and sequences themselves*. As such, this tendency defines the memory dependent signification impulse in Hejinian's poetics as its primary identity in terms of an investigation of traditional forms of autobiography. Michael Davidson's book The San Francisco Renaissance (1989) typifies this tendency. It suggests that 'Lyn Hejinian represents the most extreme version of a personalist or autobiographical impulse' insofar as Hejinian 'refuses to conceptualize personal history into a unified narrative frame'. Equating individual sentences and phrases in My Life with what he identifies as 'childhood maxims', Davidson also notes that in Hejinian's text 'certain essential connectives have been erased'.¹

There are good reasons for taking this approach as well as many critics who have, more or less, followed it. Perloff's discussion of Hejinian's My Life, in her book Radical Artifice (1991), for example, argues:

When this "autobiography" was written in 1978, it had 37 sections one for each of Hejinian's then 37 years, and each section had 37 sentences. The (unnamed) number assigned to each section governs that sections content: thus 1 has its base in infants sensations, in 9 the references are to a gawky child, in 18 someone is "hopelessly in love", in 22 there are allusions to the college reading... Accordingly, in 1986 when she turned 45, Hejinian revised My Life, adding eight sections to the narrative as well as adding eight new sentences to each section.²

¹ Michael Davidson, The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid Century (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 212-16.

² Marjorie Perloff, Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 162.

Accordingly, for Perloff, in this work 'the references gradually shift from childhood to adolescence to adult thought and behaviour'. However, at the same time, Perloff also observes that 'against the conventional autobiography, Hejinian's everywhere undermines sequence: *b* does not follow *a*, and the connectives are missing'.³ And in her earlier book The Dance of the Intellect (1985), Perloff argues that while My Life 'conveys what the archetypal life of a young American girl is like' it also 'could be anybody's autobiography' since 'the emphasis', she continues, 'is on the "life" lived by the words, phrases, clauses and sentences endowed with the possibility of entering upon new relationships'.⁴

More forcefully suggesting that Hejinian's work is 'specifically autobiographical', Craig Douglas Dworkin, in his article 'Penelope Reworking the Twill: Patchwork, Writing, and Lyn Hejinian's 'My Life' (1995), defines its 'unconventional autobiographical' mode as 'an oral history on paper'.⁵ Offering a different reason for considering Hejinian's work as an unconventional 'autobiography', Lisa Samuels, in her article 'Eight Justifications for Canonizing Lyn Hejinian's My Life' (1997), argues that 'this is the story of languaged self, a written "I," rather than the autobiography of an experienced human'.⁶ Following the same sort of suggestion, Kornelia Freitag, in her article ' "A pause, a rose, something on paper": Autobiography as Language Writing In Lyn Hejinian's My Life' (1998), considers this work primarily an 'experimental women's autobiography' in terms of its 'challenge to the genre of women's autobiography'.⁷

While generally considering My Life 'an autobiography', Hilary Clark's article 'The Mnemonics of Autobiography' (1991), rather differently, foregrounds this work's 'challenge' to 'the view that the events of a life form an ordered sequence'.⁸ Elaborating this kind of argument in his article 'Poetic Positioning: Stephen

³ Marjorie Perloff, Radical Artifice (1991), pp. 162-70.

⁴ Marjorie Perloff, The Dance of the Intellect (1985), pp. 223-26.

⁵ Craig Douglas Dworkin, 'Penelope Reworking the Twill: Patchwork, Writing, and Lyn Hejinian's 'My Life'', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 36, no. 1 (Spring, 1995), pp. 58-81.

⁶ Lisa Samuels, 'Eight Justifications for Canonizing Lyn Hejinian's My Life', Modern Language Studies, Vol. 27, no. 2 (1997), pp. 103-19.

⁷ Kornelia Freitag, ' "A pause, a rose, something on paper": Autobiography as Language Writing In Lyn Hejinian's My Life', Amerikastudien. American Studies, Vol. 43, no. 2 (1998), pp. 313-27.

⁸ Hilary Clark, 'The Mnemonics of Autobiography', Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly, Vol. 14, no. 4 (Fall, 1991), pp. 315-35.

Dobyns and Lyn Hejinian in Cultural Context' (1997), Christopher Beach observes how this 'poetic autobiography', 'foregrounds language's own capacity for a multiplicity of meanings and contexts'.⁹

But, perhaps the most perceptive consideration of Hejinian's work in this critical tendency is Juliana Spahr's article 'Resignifying Autobiography: Lyn Hejinian's *My life*' (1996). While similarly considering Hejinian's *My Life* as a 'postmodern autobiography', Spahr, more forcefully, emphasizes its 'wilful refusal to adopt any stable subject position' by insisting on its 'readerly agency' in terms of its notions of the 'open text', defining it as a 'process-centred model of subjectivity' and ultimately as 'an autobiography of multiplicity'.¹⁰

The second critical tendency toward Hejinian's work concentrates instead on the *external implicit coherence* offered by her signification rationale, or – *the invisible hints of free associations coherable by the act of readership alone*. It takes this process of re-interpretative variability as the primary identity of Hejinian's work in terms of various forms of fragmentation and discontinuity. There are equally strong reasons for taking such an approach. For example, in his 'Review of Writing Is an Aid to Memory' (1982), Steve Abbott typically points out that 'If the message remains undelivered and opposed to the author, what guidelines can the reader bring other than Stein's 'any guess is a righteous thing'.¹¹

Still more generally, Joe Brennan, in his article 'a=r=t m=e=a=n=s' (1991), comments on 'the arbitrary and intentional skewing of traditional accesses to meaning' in Language poetry arguing that:

In a strict sense any method devised to decontextualize or obscure access to conventional meaning is arbitrary and discrete in both structure and employment, whether or not its discretions are assigned to any other order.¹²

⁹ Christopher Beach, 'Poetic Positioning: Stephen Dobyns and Lyn Hejinian in Cultural Context', *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 38, no. 1 (Spring, 1997), pp. 34-44.

¹⁰ Juliana Spahr, 'Resignifying Autobiography: Lyn Hejinian's *My life*', *American Literature*, Vol. 68, no. 1 (March, 1996), pp. 141-59.

¹¹ Steve Abbott, 'Review of Hejinian's *Writing Is an Aid to Memory* (1987)', *American Book Review*, Vol. 4, no. 2 (January / February, 1982), p. 18.

¹² Joe Brennan, 'a=r=t m=e=a=n=s', *Flashpoint*, Web Issue no. 1 (Spring, 1991): <http://www.flashpointmag.com/index1.htm>

More specifically, and forcefully, commenting on what he calls the 'paradox' of the 'community of utterances' in Hejinian's *My Life*, Polish critic Antoine Cazé's article 'Form as Freedom in the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Group' (1998) suggests:

The whole purpose of *My Life* is to render the link between "My" and "Life" opaque as the text shifts the burden of creation away from a fixed, univocal persona of the poet to a collaborative utterance reconstructed by the effort the reader has to make to piece (or not) this life together.¹³

More interestingly, however, Perloff's same discussion of Hejinian's *My Life*, although defining it generally as autobiography, also observes that:

This is an autobiography that provides almost no direct reference to the basic facts...Throughout *My Life*, secrets seem about to be revealed, enigmas about to be clarified, but the moment of revelation never comes ... This reluctance, this deferral of meaning and denial of plenitude, is central to Hejinian's conception of writing.¹⁴

Even more telling in this regard, is Logan Esdale's Internet article 'This Poetry Which Is Not One' (2000) which points out how 'for Hejinian, Language has an aesthetic and a social context that needs its history and its effects unbound and unveiled – not just once, but insistently'.¹⁵

While both approaches are beneficial in identifying major aspects of the poetics of Hejinian's *Writing Is an Aid to Memory* (1978) and *My Life* (1980) & (1987), such as their fragmentary meanings and their memory meanings, their signification deniability and accessibility, their random forms and the complexity of their elaboration of Hejinian's poetic self, our argument in this chapter suggests a third.

Rather than concentrating on one side of the equation at the relative expense of the other, or defining one in terms of the other, we shall consider Hejinian's poetics as a culmination of a number of fusive dialectics whose

¹³ Antoine Cazé, 'Form as Freedom in the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Group' (1998), pp. 60-61.

¹⁴ Marjorie Perloff, *Radical Artifice* (1991), pp. 166, 68.

¹⁵ Logan Esdale, 'This Poetry Which Is Not One', *LAGNIAPPE*, Vol. 2, no. 2 (Spring / Summer, 2000), Internet journal: <http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~foust/lagniappe.html>

poetic potentials lie ultimately beyond individual generic impulses of this sort, though includes them. Both the internal and external axes of signification are *equally, inseparably and dynamically offered* by both Hejinian's strategies of signification and their animating conceptual and aesthetic leitmotifs. Significantly, David Jarraway's article "'My Life' Through the Eighties" (1992) concludes by foregrounding 'the whole question of identity in her work', asking 'What is that Hejinian has, in fact, written in *My Life*'? Can this text actually be considered "a poem"?'.¹⁶

I shall argue, therefore, that Hejinian's aesthetic, characteristically foregrounds the inevitable concomitancy of both the inner memory-reflexive meanings and the outer observation of the moments of realization of those meanings simultaneously. It does so, by its own paralogical and contradictory insistence on the continuous nature of meaning, offering *implicit coherence* through the poems' whole spectrum of aesthetic existence. Thus, there are three interdependent areas of challenge in Hejinian's signification rationale that comprise her poetics' multi-dialectical fusions of internal and external axes of meaning.

The first concerns the ways in which her poetics employs Lyotard's and Hutcheon's concepts of 'paralogy' and 'contradiction', as re-defined in chapter 3 by reference to the differential and the multiple, to critique conventional meaning and is simultaneously related to her particular kind of *implicit coherence*. The second concerns the ways in which Hejinian's poetics defines the roles of grammar, vocabulary and sequence in terms of this conceptual grammar to critique conventional concepts of meaning-containment by emphasizing her aesthetic and conceptual concern with the element of time. The third and final area concerns rhetorical or habitual ways of understanding, involving a combination of the last two areas in what this thesis calls the meaning of continuity in Hejinian's poetics.

Let us, however, examine Hejinian's Writing Is an Aid to Memory (1978) and My Life (1980) & (1987), but also her latter book Oxota: A Short Russian Story (1991) in order to demonstrate the textual means by which Hejinian's poetics comprise these sorts of complex challenges over the various periods of her poetic career:

¹⁶ David Jarraway, "'My Life' Through the Eighties: The Exemplary L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E of Lyn Hejinian', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 33, no. 2 (Summer, 1992), pp. 319-37.

1. Challenging Meaning:

Implicit Coherence, Contradiction and Paralogy

Here is an extract from Writing Is an Aid to Memory (1978).

17.

the bird carries its pick up the branch
or more
of the which pretty little flower
ear dozen
study forces the day upright
pretty flower to protect the eye in sunshine
with a white is made tall in warm
stalks
the dead are used over
the major insects was that
tile the rent become mortgage money
fortress replaced by a more natural forest
tints the tall flowers
leap the embarrassment of a great subject
high in my own eyes hanging over the day
from this aviation is clumsy
or even desirable diction
nook soaring when the moon is how romantic.¹⁷

Perhaps the very first thing that strikes us as distinctive about Hejinian's writing as demonstrated by this sample is the unique transitional calmness between its sentences and phrases, as opposed to the kind of loud fracturing of phrasal sequences which characterizes most of Bernstein's writings. Hejinian's use of textual disjunction between and within sentences and phrases *does not seem to imply sudden turns of suggestions* from one phrase or sentence to the next as in Bernstein's case. Rather, the phrasal structures seem designed in a way that indicates a delaying of formation to the meanings they inspire.

With the partial absence of such syntactic techniques, the play of gesture in Hejinian's signification rationale offers, not one, as in Bernstein's case, but two interdependent possibilities for *implicit coherence* simultaneously. The first stems from inside the text's own structural particularities, by use of dispersed and tentative hints of probable connection and meaning. The second emerges from outside these particularities, through the work's whole gestural structure or atmosphere. We shall shortly see this in two equally

¹⁷ Lyn Hejinian, Writing Is an Aid to Memory (1978), un-paginated.

interdependent ways. On the one hand, certain signification *closures* emerge from the momentary flashes of meaning-connection offered by the poem's particular choice of vocabulary and sequence, which do not depend on any normative or conventional narrativeness or linearity, hence; implicit, not explicit, coherence. On the other hand, certain signification *openness*, still more forcefully, emerges by the poem's particular choice of its overall gestural architecture. Refusing to acknowledge definite hints for meaning, this form offers, instead, the possibility for its various elements to cohere outside its own specificity needs and in accordance with the readers' re-interpretive choices.

Significantly, as we shall demonstrate below, this manifold strategy conforms, modifies and redefines three of Hejinian's most cherished ideals. Firstly, it conforms to her emphasis on what she calls the 'delaying of coherence' as a textual principle of composition in which the distinctive 'paratactic or plotless' attributes of her compositional philosophy underwrites what she terms as the 'amplification and adjustment' capabilities of her work's signification processes (LOI:59-60). Secondly, it modifies her aesthetic ideal of 'radical openness' (LOI:42) by including various signification closures implied by the memory subtracted hints of coherence in her work, despite their implicit, rather than explicit, nature. Finally, this strategy of offering *implicit coherence* from inside as well as outside the work's own structural particularity, redefines Hejinian's principal differentiation between 'form' as a 'force', and 'form' as a 'shape', as well as her subsequent advocacy of the former over the later:

Writing's forms are not merely shapes but forces; formal questions are about dynamics- they ask how, where, and why the writing moves... Form does not necessarily achieve closure, nor does raw materiality provide openness. (LOI: 42)

Evidently, the continuity of meanings implied by the 'dynamics' of the above work's signification strategies attests to their simultaneous inclusion of both the dimensions of the material and the gestural; of form as both a 'force' and a 'shape' simultaneously.

As examples of these traits, let us consider, for instance, these three consecutive lines; 'leap the embarrassment of a great subject / high in my own eyes hanging over the day / from this aviation is clumsy'. The phrase 'high on my own eyes' may be seen to reflect on the meaning of the phrase 'a great subject', being both indicative of elevation and high consideration. The reader may then ask why such a 'subject' would be 'high' in her 'own

eyes', wondering if it is somehow connected to her own personal history. For example, how 'hanging over the day' may define the poet's own upbringing environment; a farm perhaps, or urban surroundings of some spaciousness! In this sense, Hejinian's writing manages to insinuate visible possibilities for *implicit coherence* from *within* its own very disjunctive textual strategies in vocabulary and sequence, and can, therefore, be seen, as Davidson (1989:212), Perloff (1985:223) & (1991:162), Clark (1991:315), Dworkin (1995:58), Samuels (1997:103) and Kornelia (1998:313) suggest, *partially* autobiographical or reflexive of the poet's perceived memories. This level of signification, thus, implies a certain degree of textual closure modifying the kind of 'radical openness' (LOI:42) Hejinian's theoretical writings advocate.

However, the remainder of the lines 'hanging over the day' and 'leap the embarrassment of', in conjunction with the following line 'from this aviation is clumsy', seem to considerably balance such hints and counterbalance their visible, but implicit, suggestions. The work does not seem to offer definitive connections between the sentence 'aviation is clumsy' and phrases like 'hanging over the day' adjacent to it. By the same token, there is no definitive connection between the phrase 'leap the embarrassment of a great subject' and the phrase 'high in my own eyes', much less between both / either of them and the third sentence in this sequence 'from this aviation is clumsy'. As such, their possible signification coherence is also open to readers' re-interpretive imagination as critics Cazé (1998:60), Abbott (1982:18), Brennan (1991: net) and Esdale (2000: net) suggest.

However, on a third and final level, both the possibilities of visible and invisible suggestiveness can be seen to remain offered. Superficially, they can be seen as a simple absence of 'direct reference to the basic facts' as Perloff argues (1991:167), a 'multiplicity of meanings' as Beach suggests (1997:34) or a direct congregation of different poetic elements; 'an autobiography of multiplicity', as Spahr (1996:141) implies. Considered more carefully, the visible and the invisible meaning insinuations in Hejinian's poetics combine to offer collectively the possibility for *implicit coherence* through the work's whole space of aesthetic existence by (successfully) keeping their experimental non-discursive mechanisms and qualities intact and active. As such, the dimensions of shape (sequence) and force (gesture) are fused to allow, not complete openness as Hejinian suggests, but *paralogical* signification. That is, a mixture of both closure and openness that offers ample freedom of movement between readership and text while challenging normative or discursive rules of perception; redefining the boundaries of its game while seeking legitimacy by it, both at the same time.

However, Hejinian's signification rationale offers not only a double *kind of implicit coherence*, but also a different one from that of Bernstein's. In Bernstein's poetics, the particular sequencing of the writing units in each poem, as we have seen, does not seem pivotal to the workings of his poetics' signification rationale. In fact, Bernstein's poetics specifically makes such units' sequences *irrelevant* with regard to the question of writer / reader collaboration and the dilemma of the freedom of meanings it attempts to foreground. One could, in effect, read a typically *playful* poem by Bernstein from almost any writing unit, segment or section.

In Hejinian's case, by contrast, one could not do that, not because her work is any less challenging to linearity of thought, or that it is any less textually experimental, but on the contrary, because it combines both. In its own way of navigating its own experimental techniques, Hejinian's poetics allows for the sequencing of linguistic units to be both relevant and irrelevant for the signification processes at the same time, hence; her poetics is a series of *challenges* rather than one of *mistakes*. It is relevant in terms of the readers' capacity to subtract meaning based on the *implicit coherence* suggested internally by the hints for possible connection her particular sequencing most often offers from within its specific non-narrative phrasal architecture. And it is simultaneously irrelevant in terms of the readers' freedom to subtract meaning based on *implicit coherence* suggested externally by her work's particular overall gestural structure, which often claims independence from those hints. As such, the failure of Hejinian's poetics to achieve the level of openness it aspires to, is marked by its success in enacting continuous suggestiveness despite, and because of, her works' particular disjunctive techniques, offering its 'shapes' as 'gestures' of 'how, where and why' its meanings 'move' (LOI:42).

Thus, *implicit coherence* (as insistence on meaning), paralogy (as insistence on differentiability), as well as contradiction (as insistence on profound multiplicity) offer perhaps the most plausible explanation of the kind of signification rationale Hejinian's poetics practises. Each of the three levels of signification defined above, independent as it may be, is also paradoxically inter-dependent on the other to work 'hypothetically', to borrow one of Hutcheon's particularly insightful views, as though 'it is ready to accept the impossibility of its own coherence' (POP:167) and, by the same token, the differentiability of its own hinted coherence. Hejinian describes this process in her writing of another of her book-length poems The Guard (1984) in the following terms:

What I was after was not "eternity" but an impression of temporal heterogeneity, not timelessness but a strange simultaneity, a current array of disparately time-bound things.

"Here" and "there", "then" and "now", "this" and "that", are registered differently in each of

them, but all of these are contextualizing terms, and it is by virtue of this that one can speak of simultaneity and temporal heterogeneity in the same passage. (LOI:66)

This is in fact partially the reason why chapter 3 modifies Hutcheon's concept of postmodern 'contradiction' (POP:23) from one which, in her words, 'works from within conventions in order to subvert them' (5) and thus does not seek 'otherness' but only 'difference' (POP:6,65), to one in which both 'otherness' and 'difference' are paradoxically incorporated and simultaneously sought. Hejinian's poetics simply refuses to maintain a certain 'loci' for the possibilities of meaning coherence either within or outside the work's own suggested zone of poetic interaction. As Megan Simpson argues in her book Poetic Epistemologies: Gender and Knowing in Women Language-Orientated Writing (2000):

One of the defining features of language-oriented feminist epistemology, [is] that poems are not representations, but *acts* of representation. Individual words cannot be identified with individual things – we cannot tell “which word” is responsible for which meanings.¹⁸ (My Brackets)

In this sense, Hejinian's poetics is both *different*, in that it does not presuppose a complete understanding of the discursive reality it challenges, conventional or otherwise, and *other* in that it questions the investigative capacity of such realities, including its own, in order to effect *just* representational explorations into their proposable natures and meanings. In her article 'Language and Paradise' (1985), Hejinian explains how, for her, the relativity of 'reality', the 'discontinuousness of consciousness' and the 'desire to tell', often combine to effect poetic 'responses' which aspire after perfect, or 'paradise'-like, representations of their own beings and are, simultaneously, 'never successful' in their attempts:

The desire to tell within the conditions of a discontinuous consciousness seems to constitute the original situation of the poem. The discontinuity of consciousness is interwoven through the continuity of reality – a reality whose independence of our experience and descriptions must be recognized. In response, the poetic impulse, attempting (never successfully) to achieve the condition that the phrase “language and ‘paradise’ ” names, seeks to extend the scope and temporal continuity of consciousness. (LOI:77)

¹⁸ Megan Simpson, Poetic Epistemologies: Gender and Knowing in Women Language-Orientated Writing (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 13-14.

Implicit coherence (both internal and external), *paralogy (or the differential)* and *contradiction (or the multiple)* are thus defined by Hejinian's poetics as conceptual methodologies capable of aesthetically exploring the formative impacts of language on our consciousness of the world. Rather than predominantly autobiographical or radically disseminative, Hejinian's poetics, offers these methods of conception through a triple-fold signification question and a double-fold signification axis all concomitantly. Consider, for instance, these three lines from the example above: 'the dead are used over / the major insects was that / tile the rent become mortgage', with regard to the possible relationship between 'the dead', 'the major insects' and 'mortgage money'.

The first question might generally be: how the implications of such phrases would possibly cohere into a probable meaning as suggested by the poem's own internal insinuation of connection; *internal axis*. 'The dead', in other words, does have a connection to the presence of 'insects', thus our understanding of nature's workings entail. Figuratively, the connection might be that between corpses and insects feeding on them which indicates a paraxial meaning, based metonymically on the memories behind the work and may as such suggestively propose an experimental textual subjectivity in terms of an autobiography. This is what Samuels, Jarraway and Spahr respectively term 'the languaged self' (1997:103), 'the demystification of memory'¹⁹ and 'a process-centered model of subjectivity' (1996:141). However, such a connection does not seem to be supported by much tangible evidence from the poem itself. The context of the poem, in other words, does not unequivocally offer this particular connection, but does not negate its probability either. Rather, it offers its possibility among *multiple* intersecting possibilities each re-constituting the others in contradictory emphases on both otherness and difference; on both critiquing normative expectations of sequential or proscriptive meaningfulness, and refusing to negate them all together.

This, in turn, makes the possibility for *implicit coherence* from outside the poem's own suggestions also possible; what Spahr (1996:141), Beach (1997:34) and Cazé (1998:60) consecutively imply by their similar emphases on Hejinian's poetics as 'an autobiography of multiplicity', 'multiplicity of meanings and contexts' and as a 'paradoxical' 'community' of 'collaborative utterances'. It is also what Abbott implies by 'any guess is a righteous thing' (1982:18) and what Brennan generally indicates by what he calls 'the skewing of traditional access to meaning' (1991:net). The second question must then be, how, in the general picture of this poem's

¹⁹ David Jarraway, 'My Life : Through the Eighties' (1992), p. 224.

enthusiastic gestural dynamics, would the aesthetic meaning of these sentences possibly emerge independently from the poem's internal, but unsubstantiated, suggestions; *external axis*. In readership, we might for example assume the relationship between 'the dead', 'insects' and 'mortgage' to somewhat symbolically represent the relationship between the individual's life; 'the dead', contemporary economic behaviour; 'insects', and its impact on that life; 'mortgage'.

Thus seen, Hejinian's work, would be producing, not only 'multiplicity' or a 'community' of meanings, but, more importantly, a paralogical observation of those meanings' formation processes themselves. In other words, the combination between the two above questions and axes of signification define a form of **escalation** of suggestiveness that is primarily concerned with its own methods of materialization in the language of the poem. Such concern is perhaps only definable through paralogy since it offers not only a challenge to deductive linearities by offering multiple dialects of meanings internal and external, but also a method of understanding, and a means of embodiment, for language's own aesthetic plasticity being both continuous and discontinuous with its own form, attached and detached from its own meanings. Rather than the sort of purely referential relationships that are 'specifically autobiographical', challenging 'the view that a life form an ordered sequence' that Clark (1991:315) and Dworkin (1995:58) consecutively suggest, Hejinian's poetics offers textual representations of those relationships in the making, or as Morgan Simpson insightfully puts it 'not representations, but *acts of representation*' (2000:13). This, in turn, suggests a definition of Hejinian's poetics as essentially disseminative, rather than particularly autobiographical.

The poem itself, however, does not favouritize either axis of meanings, nor specifically provide reliable evidence with which to select one in readership. Consequently, the final, and the most important, signification question emerges. Is it possible to imagine the process of meaning emergence in Hejinian's poetics as a contradictory and a paralogical fusion between the two axes and questions of signification simultaneously?

This is the question toward which such conceivable axes of signification effectively dissolve, since it is the question on which the work itself seems to insist by the differentiability and multiplicity of its implied suggestions. But it is also the question that attempts to explain the meaning of continuity in the signification style of Hejinian's aesthetic as this thesis views it. That is, the concomitancy of both the memory of the meanings her work investigates in its particular sequence and choice of vocabulary, and their continuous

successive moments of present realization throughout her work's particular types of syntactic and grammatical disjunction.

This emphasis on concomitancy embodies the drive toward presentation; toward actuating meanings in their ultimate wordability and un-present-ability, or 'the desire to tell' in Hejinian's words (LOI:77). But, more significantly, it symbolizes the fact that presentation is always trying, always attempting, but, as Hejinian herself puts it, is always also 'never successful' (LOI:77). 'The absolute', as Lyotard observes 'is never there, never given in a presentation, but it is always "present" as a call to think beyond the "there". Ungraspable, but unforgettable. Never restored never abandoned' (LAS:150). However, this level of contradiction and paralogy does not emerge only from the work's 'Ex-Centric' (POP: 60) factors that fuse its signification dimensions in readership, but also from its resistance to meaning containment in terms of its use of grammar and sequence as defined by the poem's textual concept of time.

2. Challenging Containment:

The Roles of Sequence, Grammar and Vocabulary

Significantly, Hejinian's My Life (1980) & (1987) offers a more obvious example of the same sort of complexity in the signification rationale of her poetics. Here is an extract from page 54:

*The Coffee
drinkers answered
ecstatically*

The traffic drones, where drones is a noun. Whereas the cheerful pessimist suits himself in a bad world, which is however the inevitable world, impossible of improvement. I close one eye, always the left, when looking out onto the glare of the street. What education finally serves us, if at all. There is a pause, a rose, something on paper. The small green shadows make the red jump out. That is not a telescope, nor do I have stars in my belly. Such displacements alter illusions, which is all-to-the-good. Now cars not cows on the brown hills, and a stasis of mobile homes have taken their names from what grew in the valleys near Santa Carla. We have all grown up with it. If it is personal,

it is most likely fickle. The university was the cultural market
but on Sundays she tried out different churches.²⁰

At first glance, *My Life* may appear surprisingly more explicit than implicit. Superficially, sentences and clauses like 'The traffic drones, where the drones is a noun', 'Whereas the cheerful pessimist suits himself in a bad world, which is however the inevitable world, impossible of improvements', 'I close one eye, always the left, when looking out onto the glare of the street' seem to logically justify their own choices of vocabulary and sequence. The implications behind a word like 'Drones' appear, at first glance, sufficiently elaborated by its adjacent sentence 'where drones is a noun'. Similarly, the word 'pessimist' seems logically connected to the phrases 'a bad world', 'inevitable world', 'impossible of improvement'. The three sentences as a whole appear as though they are describing a situation of observation on the movements in the street. There are traffic wardens; 'traffic drones', working mechanically to issue traffic violators with penalty fines. There are people; 'the pessimists', who appear accepting their surrounding urban landscape as given; 'the inevitable world'. This is, of course, added to the observer's own position toward such panorama, which is simply to partially insulate herself; 'one eye', from its 'glare'.

However, considered more carefully, the context of this section of the work appears to deny responsibility for the hints of *internal implicit coherence* suggested by its own sequence and vocabulary. For example, the word 'traffic' in the phrase 'the traffic drones' seems quite indeterminate in its suggestions; does it signify people (cars, passers by) or does it instead signify something totally different; the establishment, the police, for example? We realise that this word is significant in some way, but we feel equally free to re-define and re-signify the existence of this very significance as well as its possible meanings.

The vague grammatical positions as well as the general anti-narrative posture in which these sentences and phrases appear further accentuate this work's refusal to offer discursive justification for its choices. In terms of grammar, for example, the second section of the conditional sentence starting with the word 'Whereas' in 'Whereas the cheerful pessimist suits himself in a bad world, which is however the inevitable world, impossible of improvements' is absent? Similarly, what does the preposition 'of' in the phrase 'impossible of improvement' identify? Does it identify the 'impossibility' of improvements, or the 'improvements' of the 'impossibility'? In

²⁰ Lyn Hejinian, *My Life* (1991), p. 54.

the same vein, what is the relationship between the interrogative 'what' and the verb 'serves' in the sentence 'what education finally serves us'?

In terms of sequence, by the same token, what are the definite sequential or syntactic relationships offered by the poem's general context between sentences like 'What education finally serves us, if at all', 'there is a pause, a rose, something on paper', 'The small green shadows make the red jump out' and 'that is not a telescope nor do I have stars in my stomach', both among themselves as such and in relation to their following sentences? This sort of blurriness in composing the poem's textual elements seems to enact its refusal to be in charge of whatever might be insinuated superficially as explicit connectiveness or un-superficially as internal implicit coherence. It does not completely deny their existence, but only its involvement in it, making such existence partially dependent on the readership re-associative possibilities and as such allowing its own *implicit coherence* to continue signification from the inside to the outside of its own disjunctive textual suggestions continually. In her interview with the Serbian poet Dubravak Djuric (1990), Hejinian notes:

One is engaged in an active mental (intellectual and emotional) operation in which one simultaneously searches for something with active expectation while awaiting the unexpected, unpredicted material. One focuses closely while expanding one's field of vision into the blurred peripheries. One is trying to be precise, to figure things out, while entertaining the incongruous, the out of scale, the excess. (LOI: 166)

Additionally, it is this insistence on continuity as perhaps the most formative leitmotif in Hejinian's poetic definition of meaning that offers its paralogical and contradictory insistence on the meaning of time in the very fabric of her poetic textual architecture. **It demonstrates a compositional philosophy for which *time* means more than just periods of verbal unfolding, but is itself an actuating criterion of the wordability of language and, beyond language, of meaning at large.** Continuity, by means of grammatical disorders, multiplicity of gestural movements, partial meaning closures and openness, syntactic disjunction, tri-dimensional *implicit coherence*, the differentiability of challenging meaning containment and stability, thus illustrates a textual re-enactment of the impact, and nature, of the element of time in the formative textuality of poetic meanings in Hejinian's aesthetic.

Part of the reason most critical considerations of Hejinian's poetics in terms of this work has largely defined it within the contours of experimental autobiography is its apparent recalling of certain incidents or situational memories as well as its use of the first person pronoun in such phrases as the 'brown hills' and 'I close one eye' in the example above. But, as we shall see below, the play of gesture in the sequence and vocabulary of Hejinian's work seems to favour such references as a viable ironic way of challenging, rather than living up to, habitual expectations of meaning containment.

Curiously, this seems represented in the text of My Life itself in such clauses as 'Such displacements alter illusions, which is all-to-the-good', reflecting on the ways in which the poem elaborates the continuity of its meanings by challenging the 'illusions' of completeness. The work's own contextual 'displacements' is itself 'all-to-the-good' because it serves to demystify hints 'alter illusions' of meaning stability and control. To be sure, let us examine another example of Hejinian's later work Oxota: A Short Russian Novel (1991) in order to demonstrate the similar presence of these compositional techniques as well as the ways in which they similarly contribute to the contradictory and paralogical signification continuity in the language / time symbiosis of Hejinian's poetics.

Chapter 135: The Formative Properties of Words

I cannot imagine a glass prose
But I was losing interest in the phenomenology of my own dreams
Daylight was thicker than it seemed – with augmentation,
 odor, air
Where are words changed?
Kuzmin, for example, had challenged the potential bliss of
 transcendence with the beauty of the world
And I trust this lust
I can't know what I've missed
Shallow dreams fall, follow
They appeal to words
It's the principle of connection not that of causality which
 saves us from a bad infinity
The word hunt is not the shadow of an accident
That hunger had no exotic antecedent
It's an ordinary shifting in a line forming near a shallow
 stairwell
That is where I waited.²¹

²¹ Lyn Hejinian, Oxota: A Short Russian Story (Massachusetts: The Figures, 1991), p. 150.

Formally speaking, Hejinian's Oxota and My Life could not be more different. Oxota is written in the general format of poetry, while My Life is written in that of creative prose. Oxota consists of 270 chapters, many of which were individually published in separate periodicals such as Fragment and Writing as separate poems.²² My Life, by contrast, in its two versions of 1980 and 1987, and 47 sections, claim overall wholesomeness. But, more generally, in Oxota there is an increased emphasis on phrasal conciseness and multiplicity of echoes by comparison to My Life. Perloff, however, sees Oxota as a continuation of the same autobiographical impulse with which she defines My Life. In her article 'How Russian Is It: Lyn Hejinian's Oxota' (1993) she argues:

In My Life (first version 1980, second, 1987), Hejinian submitted her own "story" to a new kind of simultaneous vision, her girlhood experience intersecting that of "everygirl's" in a series of deliciously comic and moving permutations. In Oxota, (the title means "the hunt"), the story broadens out to include a host of Russian and American characters, but its mysteries – what it does not tell us – make even greater demands on the reader...It is never clear in this poem of dislocations, irruptions, and veiled allusions, what is actually happening.²³

Elsewhere, Perloff insightfully acknowledges the 'deceptive flatness' of Hejinian's writings. Commenting on Leningrad: American Writers in the Soviet Union (1991) (a collaborative work between Lyn Hejinian, Ron Silliman, Barrett Watten and Michael Davidson),²⁴ Perloff also argues:

In good epic tradition the poem opens *in medias res* with "This time", the implication being that "this time" (arriving again in the Soviet Union) will be measured against another time which was somehow different. But "This time we are both" immediately displays Hejinian's deceptive flatness: the language seems totally ordinary, and yet it throws out any number of plot lines. Perhaps it means that "We are both here", but then who are "we"? And what is it we both are?²⁵

²² Lyn Hejinian, Copyright acknowledgements of Oxota: A Short Russian Story (1991).

²³ Marjorie Perloff, 'How Russian Is It: Lyn Hejinian's Oxota', Parnassus, Long Poem Issue no. 17 (Spring, 1993), pp. 186-209.

²⁴ Lyn Hejinian, Ron Silliman, Barrett Watten, Michael Davidson, Leningrad: American Writers in the Soviet Union (San Francisco, CA: Mercury House, 1991).

²⁵ Marjorie Perloff, 'John Cage's Bublin, Lyn Hejinian's Leningrad: Poetic Cities as Cybercities' in Classical, Renaissance, and Postmodern Acts of Imagination: Essays Commemorating O. B. Hardison, Jr. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996), pp. 58-75.

Other critics, however, such as Brian McHale, in his article 'Creative Misrepresentations' (1993), observes this deceptiveness with particular emphases on Oxota and, therefore, defines it in terms of fragmentary rather than autobiographical implications. He writes:

Oxota is a great echo-chamber of voices, speakers, styles and we struggle to distinguish them as one voice falls abruptly silent and another (but whose?) chimes in, or as one voice quotes or mimics or parodies another, answers an unheard interlocutor or challenges an unidentified addressee.²⁶

The same duality in critical perspectives, it seems, is offered with regard to Oxota as it has been in terms of Writing Is an Aid to Memory (1978), My Life (1980) & (1987) and Hejinian's poetics at large. It is perhaps more accurate to suggest that this work represents a continuation of Hejinian's signification rationale as observed above in both My Life (1980) & (1987) and Writing Is an Aid to Memory (1978), rather than a continuation of either her autobiographical or, otherwise, her essentially fragmentary poetics.

At first glance, there seems visible connection between sentences and phrases in this work. We can, for example, relate the reason why 'I cannot imagine a glass prose' to 'losing interest in the phenomenology of my dreams' since 'shallow dreams fall' and 'I can't know what I've missed'. Like My Life, these sentences and phrases appear, superficially, relatable by causality. Yet, at the same time, the poem's non-discursive grammatical formations of tense, sequence, vocabulary and phrasal structures combine to deny its own visible hints of coherence.

In terms of grammar, the past tense employed in the sentence 'I was losing interest in the phenomenology of my dreams' is decidedly inconsistent with the present tense employed in its very preceding sentence 'I cannot imagine a glass prose'. In terms of sequence, the hints of visible connection in terms of implied gestures between the two sentences are effectively compromised by the fact that they have seemingly happened in two different tense factors. The combination between what seems superficially as relative conjunction and the deeply disjunctive techniques of juxtaposition, offers the possibility for meaning by undetermined visible hints as well as by readership interpretative freedom of signification simultaneously. We are, in effect, made aware of the

²⁶ Brian McHale, 'Creative Misinterpretations', American Book Review, Vol. 15, no. 1 (April / May, 1993), p.31.

significance between, for example, imagining 'a glass prose' and 'the phenomenology of my dreams' and it is up to us, so to speak, to acknowledge and / or decide what this significance is in terms of a combination between the two vectors of meaning insinuation and meaning observation inspired by the sequence itself.

To be sure, Oxota includes what seems like descriptions of environmental surroundings as apparent in sentences like 'Daylight was thicker than it seemed – with augmentation, odor, air' paralleling environmental descriptions in such phrases as 'the small green shadows' or 'cows on the brown hills' in the above section of My Life. Where, in My Life, there appears to be a *situation* in which the 'glare of the street' makes it difficult to accept 'the inevitable world' and where 'cars not cows' occupy 'the brown hills', this chapter of Oxota also describes a *situation* in which the 'daylight' is heavy; 'thick with augmentation, odor' and in which 'imagination' and 'dreams' are failing; 'I cannot', to grasp the materiality of the world; 'the beauty of the world'.

Hejinian's descriptiveness however, as obvious by this definition of her signification rationale, is extremely fluid, symbolic and highly multi-layered. 'Description', for Hejinian, as she herself suggests, acts as 'phenomenal rather than epiphenomenal, original, with a marked tendency toward effecting isolation, and displacement, that is toward objectifying all that's described and making it strange' (LOI: 138).

Also like My Life, in which seeming references to the first person pronoun 'I' in sentences as 'I close one eye', 'I have stars' and 'I'm all there' are symbolically contextualized, Oxota employs the same references as apparent in sentences like 'I trust this lust', 'I can't know what I've missed' and 'That is where I waited'. Yet, in both cases, as we have seen, the 'I' is not, in Hejinian's words, 'an organizing subjectivity' (LOI:138), but a symbolic interference in such subjectivity. It is almost an embodiment of Lacan's description of the constitutive powers of language on the 'I' of its speakers, rather than a presentation of a definite historical ego:

I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object. What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming.²⁷

²⁷ Jacques Lacan, The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis, Anthony Wilden (trans. & notes), (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1968), p. 66.

The question, however, is why does Hejinian's aesthetic employ a paralogical and contradictory rationale of signification in which continuity of meanings, defuses, even refuses, its own suggestive integrity? Why does it insist on a degree of differentiability in which structural sequences, grammar and vocabulary appear, in one and the same breath, relevant and irrelevant, functional and dysfunctional, allusive and illusive? Consequently, why is the attempt to trace meaning formation processes in language's shaping of consciousness so important to the poetics of her work and, by association, to our understanding of both its inner workings and its aesthetic and cultural significance?

To put it in a nutshell, the answer appears, according to our proposed conceptual grammar, surprisingly simple. Hejinian's signification paralogy and contradiction are important to her poetics because, as in Bernstein's case, they are involved in most of its aspects and strategies either negatively by foregrounding them; forming their underlying textual procedures and rationales, or positively by actually defining their intellectual and aesthetic subject matters; giving viable forms to what would otherwise be perfectly unrepresentable in language, namely the complexities of the relationship between language, consciousness and reality. But there is another, equally significant, reason for this importance, concerning the kind of aesthetic effects the texts themselves typify and the sort of practical cultural concepts they seek to challenge, critique, replace or modify.

In terms of its cultural significance, Hejinian's poetics, as we have attempted to suggest, seeks to replace the reality presumed in unjust assumptions of a fixable language and meanings for a reality subsumed in more just resummptions of an unfixable language and meanings. The effect is most likely one of un-mediating questioning to the building of our reading beliefs, a kind of subtle heresy, a buoyancy of vision, quiet but piercing. Aesthetically, the feelings encountered as there are themselves the feelings questioned and recounted from ever being there. The pains soaked by doubt, confusion and loss are themselves the pleasures gained for the knowledge of their existence. In the very act of not understanding, we understand perfectly. The next two chapters will attempt to further elaborate how.

Chapter Eight

Hejinian's Self and Textuality

1. Challenging Formability:

Deep Parody in Hejinian's Poetic Self

The paralogy and contradiction of Hejinian's signification rationale inform her textual strategies of poetic self-constitution in two major ways. Firstly, in terms of this poetic-self's particular 'differential' (PMC:65) philosophy of *being* in which it offers what Hejinian calls its 'temporary position' and what this chapter will subsequently redefine as its *buoyancy of vision*. Hejinian observes:

Certainly I have an experience of being in position, at a time and place, and of being conscious of this, but this position is temporary, and beyond that, I have no experience of being except in position.¹

Secondly, in terms of the *continuity of form* in which this self appears offering the 'enunciative' (POP:77) or limited nature of its own textual presence. Hejinian argues:

There is no self undefiled by experience, no self unmediated in the perceptual situation; instead there is a world and the person is in it. With these considerations in mind, I attempted to write a work which would not be about a person but which would be *like* a person. (LOI:203)

Unlike Bernstein's, Hejinian's style of self-constitution does not *offer* and, *only then, blends* its textual indications of presence and absence, but is simply always attempting to be. It does not, in other words, depend for its ways on presenting temporal finalities and micro completions, but rather on presenting itself as a method of continually searching for them. As in one of Dali's surrealist paintings, we are never fully aware of the contours of that self at a given moment, despite the fact that we can see, perhaps too clearly, the space within which it operates. Charles Altieri's more recent essay 'Lyn Hejinian and The Possibilities of Postmodernism in Poetry' (1999) perceptively underlines the 'desire for self-representation' in Hejinian's aesthetic as well as its 'introspective' refusal to form:

Form is no longer a dynamic objectivity but a relational process elaborating between writer and reader gaps and connections charged with the mind's awareness of a life not reducible to any other, less intense, combinatory mode... Introspection sets the mind against its own

¹ Lyn Hejinian, 'The Poetics of Everyday Life', *Poetics Journal*, no. 9 (June, 1991), pp. 167.

images – not simply to maintain ironic distance but also to dramatize the resonant forces that circulate around the desire for self-representation.²

Thus, what has been described above in terms of Hejinian's signification rationale as a following through in time, is described hereafter in terms of her style of self-constitution as a following through in being. This is apparent in the various *shades* of formation this self takes throughout the work, as opposed to the *stages* of constitution in Bernstein's case. The most typical signature of Hejinian's paralogical and contradictory poetics is its concern with **fusiveness and continuity**, as opposed to its counterpart in Bernstein's poetics, which is primarily concerned with **blending and diversity**.

Here are two examples from two of Hejinian's poetry books The Guard (1984); one of her earliest book-length poems and Happily (2000); her latest, also book-length, poem. The Guard is considered by Hejinian's fellow Language poet Rae Armantrout (1985) as a work that is both 'continually in process' and 'extremely difficult to quote from', because of its 'formal attention to pattern and detail'.³ Perhaps this explains why it has hardly received any meaningful critical attention. For Hejinian, however, The Guard represents a significant inquiry into the relationship between words and thoughts:

Contrary to seeking a realm for privacy, the book is about words (those projectiles of communication). It's words who are guards. And users of words. Do they guard us or do they guard their things? And are they keeping something in or something out? (LOI:196)

By comparison, Happily is generally considered by critics such as Marjorie Perloff, in her article 'Happy World' (2000), as characteristic of an 'on going process' of 'writing the self' exploring 'the tension between a conception of happiness as a state of mind independent of time and circumstance, and a conception of happiness

² Charles Altieri, 'Lyn Hejinian and the Possibilities of Postmodernism in Poetry' in Women Poets of the Americas: Toward a Pan-American Gathering, Jacqueline Vaught Brogan & Cordelia Chavez Candelaria (eds.), (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), pp. 149-50. This is, of course, a recent modification to Altieri's earlier reception of Language poetry as a 'self cancelling project' in terms of its attempt to 'do Marx's work', in his article 'Without Consequence Is No Politics: A Response to Jerome McGann' in Critical Inquiry, Vol.13, no. 3 (Spring, 1987), p. 301.

³ Rae Armantrout, 'The Guard by Lyn Hejinian', How(ever), Vol. 2, no. 2 (February, 1985), Internet version: http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/however/print_archive/alerts0285.html .

as chance-ridden and fortuitous'.⁴ By contrast, Brian Kim Stefans, in his 'Review of Happily' (1999:net), considers this work an attempt to 'view thought in its moment for moment self-creation', 'subsuming within itself' what he calls 'notions of time as immeasurable quantity, but whose recognition is relevatory'.⁵

From The Guard, 1984.

Yesterday the sun went west and sucked
the sea from books. My witness
is an exoskeleton. Altruism suggestively fits.
It's true, I like to go to hardware stores
and browse on detail. So sociable the influence

of Vuillard, so undying in disorder is order.
Windows closed on wind in rows.
Night lights, unrumorlike, the reserve
for events. All day our postures were the same.
Next day the gentleman was very depressed
and had a headache; so much laughing

had upset him he thought. The urge
to tell the truth is strong. Delightful
being somewhere else, so much the moment
of equivalence. To be lucky a mediation.
To look like life in the face.
The definition quotes happiness.⁶

From Happily, 2000.

The manner in which we are present at this time to and fro
appears, we come to point of view before us
The matter is here
Can we share its kind of existence?

'I' moving about unrolled barking at blue clouds devoted to each other? To hasten to the point? To evade
anxiety? to picture?

⁴ Marjorie Perloff, 'Happy World: What Lyn Hejinian's Poetry Tells Us About Chance, Fortune, and Pleasure', Boston Review, Vol. 25 (February / March, 2000), Internet version: <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/perloff/articles/hejinian.html>

⁵ Brian Kim Stefans, 'Lyn Hejinian 'Happily'', LAGNIAPPE, Vol. 2, no. 1 (Fall, 1999), Internet Journal: <http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~foust/lagniappe.html>

⁶ Lyn Hejinian, The Guard (1984) in The Cold of Poetry (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1994), p. 14.

Having awkward heaviness 'I' never moves freely about unless
passing and happening accompanied

Our pleasure is perplexed beyond that

If we thrill to low hills because they are not composed they are
'composed for our liking'

They say there is no defining that but to say that is defining
that, living in context ⁷

Each of these two extracts seems to offer a sort of undetermined poetic self; visible enough to allow contemplation of its presence, but unguarded enough to allow questioning of its conceivable borders. For example, the first sentence of the first extract from The Guard, 'yesterday the sun went west and sucked / the sea from books', seems in itself to be both an indication of a poetic-self presence and a blurring of that presence. While indicating this self's presence by its linguistic construction, which takes the form of a statement or an observation, it shorthands this presence by the undecidability of its general suggestions and implications.

At first glance, we encounter this sentence's usual linguistic structure which contains a determination of tense; 'yesterday', of a subject; 'the sun', of first and second objects; 'the sea' and 'the books', and of a transitive verb; 'sucks'. As such, we assume that, textually at least, it should point at some equally determinable poetic self behind it; a self, that is, to whom such statement or observation is significant. Yet, this structural determination seems itself intermixed (not followed as in Bernstein's case) with an equally strong inquisitive impulse conveying instead a **detachment** between its perceivable poetic self and its own **observations** in the language of the poem. Charles Altieri's discussion of Hejinian's The Cell (1992), in his article 'The Transformation of Objectivism: An Afterward' (1999), attempts to indicate this kind of paralogical detachment in Hejinian's style of self-constitution. He argues:

Hejinian finds herself driven to decompose observation into the competing elements of seeing and believing, which then become the principal dynamic psychological and cultural forces that the poem has continually to keep in balance. The commitment to decomposition recasts the entire process of balancing as an activity that prevents postulating any overall structural

⁷ Lyn Hejinian, Happily (California: The Post-Apollo Press, 2000), pp. 13-15.

resolution. Probably no single reading can capture the range of leaps and suggestions that drive the poem, since for Hejinian observing observation opens into the various voices and echoes that allow belief to form within our visual scenarios.⁸

The reader may, for example, ask why 'yesterday' as opposed to tomorrow, why 'the sun' as opposed to the land or the sky and why 'west' as opposed to east or north or south, are particularly significant? What seems factual in form, stated clearly by the conventional structure, seems radiant with doubt and loss by the signification indeterminacy or **the buoyancy of vision** characterizing its meanings. The result is a parody of our very impression of a poetic self-presence based on such habitual perceptions of structural correctness; of our very asking if it could possibly be present, let alone determinable, in these conventional forms. Hejinian's style of self constitution thus utilises conventional syntax in one of its most classical variations; a statement, but injects it with particularly indeterminable textual and gestural suggestiveness in order to convey a questioning of this structure's ability to convey the complexity of that self in its being in language.

This is followed through in almost all of Hejinian's writings. Rather than a simple 'ongoing process' of 'writing the self' as Perloff suggests (2000:net), what appears in Hejinian's poetics at first glance as a clear indication of a conventionally structured poetic self, turns out to be a fusion of suggestions and implications between many shades of the presence, or the absence, of that very self. Here Hejinian explains:

It's through language, after all, that we discover our nonautonomous being. The very fluidity of meaning that we note in the relation of words to things, signifier to signified, makes fluid what might otherwise become rigid... Somewhere within the disputed territory of reference that separates "word" from "thing" stands that peculiar being, the grammatical first person(s).
(LOI:69,70)

This, in turn, indicates a fusion between doubt and belief in which neither is completely or visibly determinable, discernible, or even separable. The conventional structure's insinuation of a clear and concrete self-presence is intermixed with its resistance against 'positioning' or forming that self in terms of its gestural meanings or symbols. The rejection here, and paradoxically also the drive, is of, and toward, final formability. These

⁸ Charles Altieri, 'The Transformation of Objectivism: An Afterward' in The Objectivist Nexus: Essays in Cultural Poetics, Rachel Blau DuPlessis & Peter Quartermain (eds.), (Tuscaloosa & London: The University of Alabama Press, 1999), p. 307.

multiple closures and negotiations with contextual openness attempt to explore various possibilities of form and various ways of testing them. In her article 'The Person and Description' (2000); a modified version of her earlier article 'The Poetics of Everyday Life' (1991), Hejinian notes:

I attempted to write a work which would not be about a person, but which would be *like* a person. Actually, what I said to myself was that I would write a poem which was to its language what a person is to its landscape (defining landscape in the broadest possible way so as to include culture and society as well as particular rooms, cities, or natural vistas, etc.). The poem would be both in language and a consequence of it... It could not pretend to be anything other than a thinking of, for, and around itself – it would be encompassed by the context it encompassed. (LOI:203)

Almost all of Hejinian's writings are long book-length poems divided into smaller sections which are, sometimes are not, themselves divided in to smaller sections; why? The continuity of her poetic self's desire to be, what Armantrout terms as 'continually in process' (1985:net), perceivable through its signification structure's attempt to actuate this desire in the language of the various writing or reading moments of her work, prevents their holistic completability. Altieri's article 'The Transformation of Objectivism' (1999) hints to this impulse in Hejinian's poetics by arguing that:

Form, for Hejinian, is continually negotiated in the ways that readers construct tracks through the play of presence and shadows comprising the poem. Poetry can only be defined as a process of making and finding gaps and connections charged with the mind's awareness of a life not reducible to any other less intense, combinatory mode.⁹

This form of resistance to form, in terms of the continuity and the fusiveness signatures of Hejinian's paralogy and contradiction, is true not only by consideration of the structural longitude of most of her poems, but in terms of these structure's particle components such as the phrases, the clauses, the sentences and the sections as well. It is a governing factor in Hejinian's writing philosophy, that **the meaning of continuity in her poetics attempts to prevent competitive definitions as well as stability of meaning**, even while offering, on some of its generally dialectical levels of signification, certain visible hints of *implicit coherence*. But most significantly,

⁹ Charles Altieri, 'The Transformation of Objectivism' (1999), p. 306.

the meaning of continuity in Hejinian's aesthetic paralogically prevents decidable separability between doubt and faith, questions and answers, vision and blindness, because of its desire for, and contradictory resistance to, formability or finality of being.¹⁰ Tellingly, in her 'The Poetics of Everyday Life' (1991), Hejinian herself observes:

This sense of contingency is ultimately intrinsic to my experience of the self, as a relationship rather than an existence, whose exercise of the possibilities (including consciousness) of its conditions and occasions constitutes a person.¹¹

In writing, this contingent and continual sense of self (what Hutcheon calls 'enunciating subject', POP:75) harbours and justifies a search for linguistic forms that are capable of enacting it; what Hejinian sees as a poem that would not be 'about the person', but would be 'like a person' (LOI:203). It defines a particular conceptual reality whose nature attests not so much to Hejinian's attempt to *match* or *parallel* it in poetic style and strategy, as to *become* and *embody* it in what she herself defines as a 'poem' that would be 'encompassed by the context it encompassed' (LOI:203). As in the case of Bernstein's poetics, Hejinian searches for linguistic enactments *that would justly be her own conceptual realities*, and vice versa, hence; its paralogy and contradiction. But, unlike Bernstein, Hejinian's search is marked by a **strong belief** in language's abilities to represent its own processes of being, although, not perfectly, hence; the implied emphasis on continuity and the meaning of time. Such belief is readily detectable in the calmness of her phrasal and syntactic movements; the general **deceptive** flatness of her style, the use of tri-fold *implicit coherence*, the lack of sharp or provocative humour in her work and the use of only subtle or hidden *deep parody*.

That is to say that, in Hejinian's poetics, part of the drive for embodiment and representation is the knowledge of the impossibility of perfect embodiment and representation. The paralogical desire for fusing the 'encompassed' and the 'encompass-or' is itself the knowledge of the inevitable failure for complete fusion. And as we have seen, in the very structures of memory-based micro closures of meanings and visibility of self,

¹⁰ Notably, the anonymous review of Hejinian's work in the Publisher Weekly underlines the importance of this question by commenting on the sense of disorientation often encountered by the readers regarding her poetics' refusal to posit definite form or seek completion of meanings, arguing that 'the process for the reader is like going up the down escalator, you never seem to get anywhere, but you do keep going' Vol. 241, no. 35, (August 29th, 1994), p. 66. In another issue of the same magazine the comment is similarly made about Hejinian's poetic-self as 'so disjointed that readers are left to piece it together' Vol, 239, no. 53, (December 7th, 1992), p. 60.

¹¹ Lyn Hejinian, 'The Poetics of Everyday Life' (1991), p. 167.

Hejinian's poetics offers the loss of those meanings and the doubts in the contours of that self. While presenting the drive for being, it also presents the knowledge of its impossible absoluteness. In her article 'Strangeness' (1988), Hejinian tellingly argues:

Because there is a relationship between the mind and the body, there are inevitable experiences of instability and therefore of loss and discontinuity. Loss of scale accompanied by experiences of precision ... "I," the dreamer-observer, experience no self-consciousness. I exist as if absorbed into an audience, or as if no one at all.¹²

As such, both her failures in achieving such enactments, in terms of offering visible levels of *implicit coherence*, and her successive attempts to find them, in terms of testing various linguistic forms and formats, combine to define the paralogical and the parodic signature of Hejinian's poetic self-presentation.

Paralogical because this poetic self undermines the formability conditions upon which it could exist as such; its own linguistic consistency. Appealing for legitimacy, by challenging the kind of structures and phraseology that ordinarily offers it. And it does so, not by contrasting or mocking such structures, as in Bernstein's case, but by immersing them in highly indeterminable contents, or suggestions, that are both *deceptively* harmonious and contextually blurred. And parodic, because in its fusion of structural content and significance discontent, it makes its visible conventional appearance particularly **secondary** with regard to her poetics' attempt to enact this kind of linguistic self-being.

For example, in the sample above from The Guard, we read 'yesterday the sun went west and sucked the sea from books' and for a moment, however brief, imagine that we have captured a commentary on life; a re-contextualization of nature, a structural content through which the poetic self passes a qualitative judgement of some sort. But then, by the context of its immediate surrounding sentences 'my witness was an exoskeleton', 'Altruisms suggestively fits', 'its true, I like to go to hardware stores and browse on detail' we find that the structure of this very sentence itself has almost fragmented our initial impression, diversified and multiplied it beyond any singular relation to a stable selfhood with which we can unproblematically identify. As Perloff also notes in her 'Happy World' (2000) 'sentences are left incomplete, pronouns like 'it' are left undefined,

¹² Lyn Hejinian, 'Strangeness', Poetics Journal, no.8 (June, 1989), pp. 32, 36.

prepositions signalling time and space relations are indeterminate, and sentences do not directly connect... Chance teaches the poet to trust finitude, to dwell ... on possibility.¹³

In this sense, while both Hejinian and Bernstein use *deep parody* to criticize the implied narrowness of conventional uses of language, the kind of *deep parody* employed by Hejinian's poetics is characteristically more general. Parody, in Hejinian's poetics, does not actually quote these uses themselves as Bernstein's does, but only their shadows, or the mental habits of deduction encoded in their kind of language, offering linguistic formulations that resemble, rather than, recite, them.

Words like 'exoskeleton' in the sentence 'My witness is an exoskeleton', for example, is not particularly associated with proverbial or common uses of language like, for instance, 'Will you promise not to get mad / if I tell you something?' in Bernstein's poem 'Locks Without Doors', from his book Dark City (1994), or 'It's not where you're going, it's / Where you've been' in his poem 'House of Formaldehyde', from his book Rough Trades (1991). Rather the word 'exoskeleton', with its obvious strangeness in this particular sequence, harbours a joke; a parody, of the common mental habits of deductions associated with normative textual expectations and definitions of the inevitability of meaning in discursiveness. We may ask, for example, how relevant the symbolization of a word like 'exoskeleton' is. Meanwhile, the sentence itself seems to ask, how discursively systemized our habits of discursive reasoning are; how limited and ironic? It seems to ask what *relevance* itself, in this sense, means?

As I have attempted to imply, however, more recent critical considerations of Hejinian's poetics, particularly in response to her latest work Happily, have started to touch on the ways in which her poetic self employs continuity as a principle of textual orchestration. However, they have not recognized the paralogical and contradictory motifs and rationales that underwrite its various manifestations. The most insightful of these considerations is perhaps Brian Kim Stefans's in the Internet Journal LAGNIAPPE (1999). He argues:

There is an "ambient" quality to this work, an attempt to provide the "mental furniture" to daily living and thinking which approaches as from a distance, but a distance that is *neither exterior or interior*, but is to be found in language. That it appears "far" is mostly a quality of

¹³ Marjorie Perloff, 'Happy World' (2000), Internet version:
<http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/perloff/articles/hejinian.html>

the measured *incompleteness* of the phrasing, which can be contrasted to the overdetermined quality of the aphorism or rhymed couplet. The sentences have a self containment – they can be read individually for their contents and aporias – but fall, when taken on a long-view, into a pragmatist's discourse of viewing thought in its moment-by-moment self-creation.¹⁴ (My Italics)

However, Hejinian's *Happily* does not only follow her style of self continuous formation as defined above, but also reflects on it, making such reflection itself an added dimension in this very formation. The concept is admittedly more complex than needs saying, but I shall try to disentangle it the best I can. Consider, for example, a sequence of sentences like "I moving about unrolled barking at blue clouds devoted to each other? To hasten to the point? To evade anxiety? to picture?". On one level, this sequence offers the same triple dimensions of constitution for Hejinian's poetic self. Firstly, in terms of the structural dimension, the phrases 'To hasten to the point? To evade anxiety? to picture?' seem not only understandable in themselves as such, but also indicative of, and attributable to, a definable textual self in terms of their conventional linguistic structure. In this sense, these phrases seem to imply that indeed we can 'share its existence'.

Secondly, in terms of gestural or contextual suggestiveness, the sequence seems undecidable, indeterminate and highly fluid. For example, in the question 'can we share its kind of existence?', what does the pronoun *it*, in 'its kind of existence', signify? By the same token, whom does the phrase 'to each other', in "I moving about unrolled barking at blue clouds devoted to each other?", denote? The poem itself does not attempt to offer any explanation as to the significances of these phrases and words. As such there is a *buoyancy of vision* in which the poetic self's initial visibility paradoxically evades focus. The third dimension fuses these two dimensions together, in a continuity of *being* that presumes its formation by their quiet fusion, so that the self becomes textually investigative and contextually intuitive both at the same time and within the different moments of its continuous inception.

There is, however, a fourth dimension added in the contextual dynamics of *Happily*'s writing. It stems from the combination of the previous three dimensions in order to *represent* the very process of their combination itself;

¹⁴ Brian Kim Stefans, 'Lyn Hejinian *Happily*' (1999), Internet version: <http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~foust/lagniappe.html>

Hejinian's own writing's styles of poetic self-constitution. One could, for example imagine the movement between words like 'moving about unrolled barking at blue clouds devoted to each other?' not as a question, but as itself a representative of the kind of multiple planes within which signification moves between these three dimensions in the act of readership. In other words, does not one conceivably move 'about' as though trying to 'unroll' that self from its textual manifolding, 'barking' at it out of frustration and insistence; 'devoted', on recognizing its *voice*, battling with every thing; 'blue clouds', even with one's own self; 'each other'? The following sentence makes this reading much clearer as it actually defines the process of self-constitution in the poem by suggesting that 'the 'I' never moves freely about' since it is always in a state of 'happening' or being, which is never completed, but is often 'accompanied', perhaps by the others or, in Hejinian's own terms, by 'the audience' (LOI: 145).

This representation forms a sort of self reflexive detachment from the textual process of being in the work itself; **a paralogical statement of awareness based on observation of the process of meaning formation in the poem, by the poem. It confirms our earlier reading of Hejinian's beyond-autobiography poetics since it emphasizes her concern with Language's self-reflexiveness rather than her own.** Hejinian's textual strategies of composition, or fragmentation style further elaborates and consolidates this argument.

2. Challenging Textuality:

The Role of Hejinian's Fragmentation Style

I have argued earlier that the particular fusive dynamics of Hejinian's paralogical and contradictory poetic strategies reject micro completions of meaning while individually offering various momentary meaning closures. I have also argued that one reason for her poems' mostly epic dimensions is the notion that her strategy of self-constitution partially rejects, and partially yearns for, final formability and, as such, wishes to simply continue. However, in terms of textual fragmentation styles, Hejinian's unit of writing seems to take this strategy one step further. That is, the unit of writing in Hejinian's poetics seems to resist both micro and macro completions, implying the often book-length physical dimensions of her work, not only as a decorative gesture symbolizing infinity, but as a textual necessity of her works' conceptual demand for continuous linguistic orchestration. For Hejinian:

Carla Harryman, Ron Silliman, and Barrett Watten have all used the paragraph as a device, either to organize or to revolutionize (Carla often does this) a text, but I really have not— I could say I have failed to do so... My goal has been to escape *within* the sentence, to make an enormous sentence – not necessarily a long one, but a capacious one. (LOI: 195)

Put another way, the fusiveness and continuity signatures of Hejinian's paralogical, contradictory, *implicitly coherent* and *deeply parodic* poetics are symbolized and crystallized by her poem's structural particulars, or what I have called her fragmentation style. Some critics have generally hinted at this impulse in Hejinian's poetics. Edwin Morgan, for example, comments on her textual desire for formal 'endlessness' by describing Hejinian's *My Life* (1980) & (1987) as 'a small-scale structure but over all endlessness, as in some Indian music or Scottish pibroch'.¹⁵

There are, of course, physical dimensions to each and every word or letter on a page. In this sense, we can even say, however arguably, that these dimensions represent some form of completion and could, therefore, be considered indicative of the unit of writing in Hejinian's poetics. Naturally, this is to be added to the frequent particle closures that her poetics' signification rationale offers on one of its triple-fold meaning levels and, more generally, to the formal limitation of a page-based poetics (as opposed to the verbal, visual and sound dimensions offered by contemporary techno-art). In this sense, it seems only prudent to argue that Hejinian's conceptual demand for formally endless textual extensions remains partially achieved in her poetics, perhaps in her kind of poetics at large.

Nevertheless, within its general page-based limits and usual hints of closure, the unit of writing in Hejinian's poetics offers resistance to conventional notions of wholesomeness by randomly vibrating between the phrase, the sentence, the line and the paragraph. I shall take, as examples of this, three excerpts from three of Hejinian's least discussed works re-published in her poetry collection *The Cold Of Poetry* (1994): *Gesualdo* (1978), *Redo* (1984) and 'Ground' (1994). Despite their considerable significance in elaborating some major aspects of Hejinian's poetics such as the unit of writing in her texts, the role of formal or compositional harmony, the type of *deep parody* employed in her work and the predominantly readerly or contemplative, as opposed to

¹⁵ Edwin Morgan, 'Language, Poetry, & Language Poetry', *Edinburgh Review*, no.97 (Spring, 1997), p. 158.

performed, register of her writing, these works have received very little critical attention, particularly when compared to the critical attention received by Writing Is An Aid To Memory (1978), Oxota: A Short Russian Story (1991) and, especially, My Life (1980) & (1987). Containing many other of Hejinian's book-length poems such as The Guard (1984) and 'Oblivion' (1994), The Cold of Poetry (1994) has been reviewed anonymously in such journals as the Publisher Weekly (1994) as 'wryly meditative in tone' whose poems are 'philosophical reveries' attempting to represent 'thoughts in formation' as though 'she rummages around in her mind to see what odds and ends she can turn up'.¹⁶

From Gesualdo, 1978.

white

The idea is outstripping – or second –but
it is never single, simple, nor a mode of
imitation. He roared sorrow, white, long,
and rising. Can I wait for a gradual
resolution? The concept of style as willful
personal creation is devised to a new
demand. My consciousness is urgent. The
contrast is between genius and duration.¹⁷

From Redo, 1984.

Agreement swerves
a sonnet to the consonants.
Sparrows. As a wind
blows over the twigs of a rough nest
entered by a bird that impales

a vowel on its beak.
When unable to think of two things
unless we think twice, the rower
in the water jerks to travel. Her autobiography
is ninety percent picaresque.¹⁸

¹⁶ 'Review of The Cold of Poetry', Publisher Weekly, Vol. 241, no. 35 (August 29th, 1994), p. 66.

¹⁷ Lyn Hejinian, Gesualdo (Berkeley, CA: Tuumba Press, 1987), in The Cold of Poetry (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1994), p. 65.

¹⁸ Lyn Hejinian, Redo (Grenada, Miss: Salt-Works Press, 1984), in The Cold of Poetry (1994), p. 91.

As,
after all, explanation is to understand, and discursive from
that centre. No more so than even more. Through the dark
room windows like the backs of hands, the banks of myrtle
in the summer smell tossed, took water down just beneath
the light.

Beginning days of breaking themselves. About the shape
of the town flag, posed formally in the wind, flapping and
curbed overland with no longer any sense of a story at all.
The child jumps in. The way it opens on itself, takes on, and
carries its own weight in its momentum, instance, so making
an occasion – a light vocabulary – but drawn in floral, if you
can.¹⁹

In the first example, from Gesualdo, the first clause 'The idea is outstripping – or second / – but it is never single, simple, nor a mode / of imitation, he roared sorrow, white, / long, and rising' consists of three complete sentences: 'the idea is outstripping', 'it is never single' and 'he roared sorrow', an incomplete sentence; 'nor a mode of imitation' and five adjectival phrases; 'or second', 'simple', 'white', 'long' 'and rising'. Yet, there is almost nothing in this clause, either among its components sentences and phrases individually or between them collectively and their following sentence 'Can I wait for gradual resolution?' that indicates a stoppage of some description to the structural logic of its textual continuity. The second sentence 'can I wait for gradual resolution?' can perhaps be seen, in its own right, as a **formal** micro completion, a question that indicates an answer somewhere. But the same is also applicable to almost every component sentence or phrase in the clause that precedes it such as 'the idea is outstripping', 'it is never single' or 'he roared sorrow', which makes their juxtaposition in this manner much less indicative of unitary completions, than of continuation, in the compositional strategy employed.

In other words, each of these phrases' and sentences' stoppage is essentially continuous with the other, maintaining, not breaking, their fragmentary philosophy of juxtaposition. In terms of both their disjunctive *consistency* and their signification *multiplicity*, these seeming stoppages enact a textual logic of continuity in which they *similarly* resist their own completions. By not breaking their general disseminative methodology of

¹⁹ Lyn Hejinian, 'Ground' in The Cold of Poetry (1994), p. 42.

juxtaposition, they become, on this level, formally harmonious and consistent, rather than dissimilar and discontinuous.

As such, the full-stop punctuation marks between the clauses and sentences of this section of the poem, in terms of Hejinian's fragmentation style, are meant more symbolically than directly. Formally speaking, the sentence 'Can I wait for gradual resolution?', for example, may be included as part of its previous clause without actually disturbing the mechanism of juxtaposition followed throughout the whole work. This is more clearly implied by the third sentence in the same section 'The concept of style as willful personal creation is devised to a new demand' which identifies itself in terms of meaning with the same sequential differentiability followed throughout Hejinian's poetics, but which follows the same textual logic of juxtaposition as its previous sentences and clauses. Again, one could, in effect, also add it as part of its previous sentence to form a clause without any sense of breakage to the compositional logic applied. The same could also be said about the remainder of these two sentences in this section of the poem.

What this means, however, is that formally, at least, this is a never-ending poem. There is no particular compositional goal (like counterbalance between the conventional and non-conventional registers in Bernstein's poetics, for example) towards which it seems to keep working other than its enactment of the continuity and fusiveness of meaning implied by its signification rationale. In formal terms, the poem attends a constant stream of non-narrative linguistic elements between which there are intervals working to accentuate, rather than undermine, its own differential desire for what Morgan calls 'endlessness' (1997:158) and what Armantrout terms as 'continually in process' (1985:net). Hejinian's 'Ground', illustrates this more clearly, since it is written in all five usually ascertainable units of writing; the word, the phrase, the sentence, the clause and the paragraph, eliminating thereby the possibility of even a paragraph-based unit of writing. Firstly we may see the proposition 'As' in the beginning of the first block of writing, as itself representing the writing unit in this work. It is written on the right-hand side of this section, on a line of its own followed by a further separating punctuation mark, the comma, as though to indicate its textual independence from the rest of the sequence.

However, it is significantly followed by a sequence consisting of a phrase, an incomplete sentence and a complete one, aggregated randomly with no particular textual hierarchy as though to indicate both their challenge to the one-word writing-unit theory, and their simultaneous emphasis on themselves as possible

alternatives. Thus, the phrase 'after all' asserts its textual and contextual independence from both its immediately preceding word 'As' and its immediately following sentence 'explanation is to understand'. Textually, it obviously does not share the identity of either, since it is neither a sentence nor a word. Contextually, like the proposition 'As', its meaning is paradoxical since there is no apparent argument against which 'after all' can discursively affirm a stable significance.

The same is also true with regard to the sentence 'explanation is to understand' which is preceded and followed by three different phrases that do not share its textual identity, but very much share its logic of disjunction. Attempting to ascertain themselves as a possible unit of writing by their assumption of textual independence, they thus undermine the sentence-theory unit of writing. Not surprisingly perhaps, this is also followed by a long clause whose internal components maintain the regularity of textual fracturing among themselves as such while, as a clause, representing a textual attempt to assume a possible alternative for the identity of Hejinian's unit of writing. Hejinian herself argues:

Although I have varied the shape and quality of lines so as to make each line equivalent to a "unit of thought" or "unit of cognition," it isn't that the line "contains" the thought, it's rather that it's a possible measure of the creativity of thinking within the thinkable, perceivable world. (LOI: 193)

However, this particular sequence of a word, phrase, sentence, clause, insofar as it is arbitrary, is not in itself a pattern followed in Hejinian's writing. Yet, as we have argued, Hejinian's poetics is not free of formal patterning and identifiable closures. There is, as we have seen, a certain amount of formal consistency implied by the textual application of the principles of formal continuity and fusiveness in her poems. For example, all of the linguistic components of the two sections of this example seem to congregate in what appears to be a paragraph. Yet, neither in terms of their individual comprising units nor in terms of their totality do they actually identify themselves as one. Their continuation of the same strategy of putting together textually **random** and contextually disjunctive linguistic units resists the idea of their being formally complete, or finished, be it with regard to their signification rationale or with regard to their compositional style.

What this means, however, is not the simple undecidability of a blurring, and blurred, poetics. Nor only, a straightforward enactment of the continuation dilemma of *being through time* observed by Hejinian's

signification rationale and style of self-constitution. Rather, what this means, in addition, is the textual absence of certainty as a cultural, or an aesthetic leitmotif, enacted in poetic form. This is what Laura Hinton's article 'Centering Margins' (2000) defines as a poetics that is 'troubled by the very representational base of language itself'.²⁰ Implied in such uncertainty is, consequently, the search for linguistic formula that is *just* to the implied experience of the world and an acknowledgement of the necessity and urgency for that kind of search, which as we shall see in the following chapter, connotes the sentiment of the sublime. Stephen-Paul Martin summarizes a parallel impulse in Language writing generally, in his article 'Reading in the Words' (1987):

This means that Language writing is not merely an aesthetic activity. It is a reassessment of consciousness... It is in some ways a response to Adorno's declaration that "after Auschwitz, all lyric poetry is barbarism." In a world that is dangerously in need of renovation, mere aesthetic excellence is not enough. The burden is placed squarely on those who work with language to question it, and to ask their readers to do the same.²¹

This is perhaps why Hejinian's texts appear much more readerly than particularly performerly. From readership, or re-writerly, point of view, her work's insistence on the textual paralogy and contradiction of its compositional logic in terms of the differential non-finality and multiplicity of its particle suggestive meanings, combine to compromise the kind of audience micro-satisfactions necessary for a performative viability. On the grounds of both form and content, most of Hejinian's work lacks the definable rhetoric sharpness of either contrast or balance that may endow it with a performerly edge, hence; the transitional calmness between sentences and phrases characterizing her styles. Yet, on both grounds, Hejinian's poetry offers the necessary form of continuous and fusive suggestiveness for demanding equally continuous and fusive readerly contemplation. **However, this should not imply that her poems *cannot* be read to an audience, but only that their performativity is improvisational rather than structural, suggestible rather than integral.**

Sentences like 'Beginning days breaking themselves', in the last example of Hejinian's 'Ground' for instance, which possess certain musical register implied by the verbal similarity between the two words 'Beginning' and 'Breaking' and by its general phrasal sequence, do not possess any particular significance in terms of their

²⁰ Laura Hinton, 'Centering Margins: The Language Poets Reconsidered (as Women)', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 41, no. 1 (Spring, 2000), pp. 180-88.

²¹ Stephen-Paul Martin, 'Reading in the Words', American Book Review, Vol. 9, no. 4 (September / October, 1987), p. 20.

meaning that would foreground such musicality for a stage-audience. And sentences which do not possess such musicality are either too short; 'the child jumps in', or too long; 'The way it opens on itself, takes on, and carries its own weight in its momentum, instance, so making an occasion – a light vocabulary – but drawn in floral, if you can', to inject their musical structure with any specially-designed audience-related appeal. As Peter Quartermain's article 'Syllable as Music: Lyn Hejinian's *Writing Is An Aid to Memory*' (1992) observes, Hejinian's musical strategies work generally to 'profoundly ambiguate the poem by on the one hand making us distrust the completeness of the words we do see as complete, whilst on the other they encourage us to provide our own substitutions and omissions – creating once again, resonances, overtones'.²²

Even the amount of dry humour employed in Hejinian's writing is partially compromised for performerly perception. It lacks the meaning immediacy and sharpness that it needs for making a stage-based sense. Consider, for example, the phrasal movement between the side title of this section of Hejinian's 'Gesualdo', the word 'white', and the first sentence of the section itself 'The idea is outstripping', or the phrasal movement between the long clause 'The idea is outstripping – or second – but it is never single, simple, nor a mode of imitation, he roared sorrow, white, long, and rising' and its immediately adjacent sentence 'Can I wait for gradual resolution?' in the same poem. The phrasal movement is simply too contemplative, too calm, to offer a stage appeal.

The word 'stripping' though complicated and mediated by the prefix 'out' is still capable of insinuating or recalling its standard designation in today's language, which ties it to strip-clubs and such like references. This, in turn, is contrasted to the side title 'white' if defined as implying a serious social cause as suggested by the remainder of the sentence 'but it is never single, simple, nor a mode of imitation, he roared sorrow, white, long, and rising'. This section of the sentence itself similarly suggests both *deep parody*, by the ridiculing implications of the implied contrast between the seriousness of the sentence 'he roared sorrow' and the playfulness of the words 'white, long, and rising', and a degree of dry humour suggested by the implications of the movement between the sentence 'he roared sorrow' and the words 'white, long, and rising'. As such, the humorous implications of Hejinian's style of textual fragmentation is much more readerly directed than performerly suggested.

²² Peter Quartermain, 'Syllable as Music: Lyn Hejinian's *Writing Is An Aid to Memory*', *Sagetrieb*, Vol. 11, no. 3 (Winter, 1992), pp. 25-26.

Chapter Nine

Hejinian's Sublime Poetics

The last two chapters have argued that Hejinian's emphasis on textual and contextual continuity and fusiveness, elaborates her poetic search for just poetic representations of the ways in which she aesthetically conceives of language's influential roles in consciousness, by attempting to follow this influence in its actions toward poetic meaning. They have also suggested that the implied aesthetic experiences of Hejinian's poetics are most often those paradoxical ones of haziness, doubt and loss in which both vision and illusion are almost totally integrated; contradictorily practised and paralogically conceptualized.

However, if these cultural and aesthetic effects are as important to Hejinian's poetics as we claim them to be, then it is possible to imagine them harbouring a more radical questioning of the conceivable real. For Hejinian, the difference between the *dream* reality and the *real* reality, lies in our willingness to discount the proposed investigation of reality imposed by the former on the later. She argues:

It is the noncoherence of dreams, or of the objects in dreams, that is exactly what makes us suspect them of being unreal... This is true only until our examination of the "real" is such that its components too are dispossessed of their obviousness and necessity. They are, at least in my experience, not so much decontextualized, as arrested, until the entire universe of context seems to implode into them, abandoning the observer. (LOI:147)

This is what Megan Simpson's book Poetic Epistemologies (2000) emphasizes in terms of 'reality as a process' in Hejinian's aesthetic:

That reality is a process, and a person's knowledge of reality is also therefore a process – something experienced rather than something possessed – is a central motivating assumption behind Lyn Hejinian's poetics.¹

It is, thus, conceivable to see this kind of questioning of reality as reflected by, and indicative of, not only the kind of multiplicity and differentiability which chapter 3 has discussed in terms of Hutcheon's concept of postmodern 'contradiction' and Lyotard's concept of 'paralogy', but also the kind of 'conflict between the faculties of the subject', 'the faculty to conceive of something, and the faculty to present something' (PMC:77) with which Lyotard defines his concept of the postmodern 'sublime'.

¹ Megan Simpson, Poetic Epistemologies (2000), p. 12.

Hejinian's poetics, as we have seen throughout the last two chapters, particularly in terms of its emphasis on textual and contextual continuity, is motivated by a search for pure presence; insisting on offering just poetic reproductions of its own meaning experiences of language's constitutiveness of the world. Its conceptual leitmotifs are, therefore, recognizable in terms of 'the faculty of conception' and the drive toward knowledge, but also in terms of the 'the faculty of presentation' and the drive toward presence and actuality (PMC:77). Yet, as I have attempted to indicate before, the drive for presentation itself implies an equally strong demonstration of the failure of imagination to present 'an object which might, if only in principle, come to match the concept' as Lyotard puts it (PMC:78). Language, Hejinian's poetics argues, is, in short, a never-ending continuation of its own attempts for meaning:

The writer experiences a conflict between a desire to satisfy a demand for boundedness, for containment and coherence, and a simultaneous desire for free, unhampered access to the world prompting a correspondingly open response to it. (LOI:41)

It is in this sense, that her poetics uses differential and inherently 'ex-centric' (POP:57)² signification style in which the play of gesture assumes *implicit coherence* through the work, both inside and outside its own particular suggestiveness, simultaneously. Her works' particular deployment of *differential* tense structures in seemingly conventional grammatical registers and its employment of *multi-dimensional* axes and questions of significations that diffuse its own hints of explicit meaning are all parts of the Hejinian-esque textual strategies and mechanisms that aesthetically imply this conflict between the faculties of the subject. In Hejinian's own words, this is a conflict between 'the desire for containment', or 'the faculty to present something' in Lyotard's terms (77), and the desire for 'free-'dom, or 'the faculty to conceive of something' as Lyotard puts it (PMC:77).

It is in this sense also that her poetics utilizes a style of self-constitution that resists final formability and direct identifiability in its very acts of attempting to linguistically become. Perspective, in Hejinian's textual concept of self, as we have seen, is more the product of readership than of the writing itself. What interests her, she notes 'are not so much the things, which simple conjunction leaves undisturbed, but the transitions between them and between them and us. It is in these transitions that the activity of being is exercised – the work of being in the world, perceptible and, in the case of sentient things, perceiving' (LOI:136).

² See chapter 3, section: 4.a.

The de-focalization of poetic sight, or in Hejinian's own words, 'the transitions' between 'objects' and 'us', becomes her poetic-self's attempt to prove it is linguistically happening; what she calls 'the activity of being'. Yet, it is also that 'activity' which equally reflects the 'enunciating' (POP:75)³ incompleteness or inadequacy of that very language in the constitution of that very 'being', not to mention its *readerly* page-based limitations. As such, Hejinian's poetic self, signifies both the attempt to enforce and the attempt to question, the drive toward presentation and the failure in presentation, 'the desire for boundedness' and 'the desire for access' as she herself puts it, or, in Lyotard's words 'the search for new presentations not in order to enjoy them, but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable' (PMC:81).

Hejinian's style of textual fragmentation re-emphasizes what could be termed the particular **contemplative** tone of Hejinian's sublime poetics in terms of her texts' predominantly readerly attributes such as their use of humour, musicality and the unit of writing. Let us, however, consider one last piece of Hejinian's writing in order to demonstrate the ways in which this form of sublime emerges in combinations with its various textual strategies as defined in the previous chapters. Here is a short extract from her long poem 'The Person' (1994):

The solitude flared out
 Ears – almost every person has some
 The stain of the urgent wordiness on idea life
 In the rain is the let & flow
 The positions of the head are finite
 More obstacle than the rain is the hour in the air
 The air woolly as one awakens, the light oppressive
 rather than expansive
 But that's not fair! I complained, the room merely tinted
 with spatiality
 My intuition tells me that light is discontinuous
 There are only brief, unrelated lights
 Day and night they lie within these

I hear the sound of the many stones outside pronoun
 Household substantive (long life, hyperspace, domestic
 genders, our predictability, our trajectory, and so on)
 in the talk about talk – it wounds the feelings
 A tide denied to the little pond, even a tiny one
 What I learn is the link of weeds as I like it
 There are lifespan and detection

³ See chapter 3, section: 4. b.

At first glance, Hejinian's 'The Person' seems to be a thematic poem in which the word 'person' is repeated recurrently. Similarly, for example, her poem 'Oblivion' (1994, 1996) starts with the word 'oblivion' and her 'The Thirty Nights' (1996)⁵ repeats the word 'sleep' several times. This apparently thematic approach in some of Hejinian's writing is, at one and the same time, both deceiving and telling. Deceiving, because its seeming insinuation of a discursive connection between the poem's title and the poem's possible subject matter harbours a strong interrogative impulse, which not only critiques and denies such connection, but also parodies its very presumption by readership expectations. It is also telling, because it is by its very use that Hejinian's typical tri-fold *implicit coherence* takes effect.

For example, the relationship between a sentence like 'A tide denied to the little pond, even a tiny one' and the following sentence 'what I learn is the link of weeds as I like it' seem to connote both discursive connection in the relationship between 'weeds' and 'the pond', and an *implicit coherence* implied by the disjunctive juxtaposition of these two sentences. The poem itself does not explain why or how 'A tide' is 'denied to the pond'. Moreover, both the words 'tide' and 'pond' remain fluid in form and context. The poem neither explains what they symbolize in this particular context, nor clearly defines their relationship to the clause 'I learn is the link of weeds as I like it'? As such, would the text itself be responsible for the creation of such a relationship, or would the reader be? That is, would the responsibility for creating such a relationship lie somewhere in between the reader and the text? Where?

In short, the undecidable insinuation of discursive connection is present, though simultaneously denied, in order to both represent and, similarly, parody our perceptual insistence on discursive relationships as the means to meaningfulness. That is, it offers multi-dimensional fusions between internal and external forms of *implicit coherence* on the one hand, and discursive possibilities for explicit coherence on the other, or between the visible and invisible hints of *implicit coherence* on the one hand, and the denied hints of discursive connections on the other. The grammatical structure and the choice of vocabulary both particularly highlight this

⁴ Lyn Hejinian, 'The Person' in *The Cold of Poetry* (1994), pp. 144-45.

⁵ Lyn Hejinian, *Guide, Grammar, Watch, and The Thirty Nights* (Australia: Folio (Salt), 1996), pp. 51-63.

signification rationale by their subtle plasticity and calm indeterminacy. Apparently, there is a 'link' 'of' 'weeds' – not *among* them, or *between* them – and there is a 'self' who seems to like something the poem calls 'it'? While denying any responsibility for producing its hints of discursive meanings, the **disjunctive** phrasal architecture itself emphasizes **conjunctive** possibilities for *implicit coherence* throughout the poem's whole space of aesthetic existence.

A good example of this kind of fusion is perhaps apparent in the extremely vague, but surprisingly suggestive, grammatical locations of the component vocabulary of the phrase 'I learn is'. Initially, the sentence 'I learn' on its own, with its obvious conventional structure, offers a discursive explicit meaning. However, the verb 'is' at the end of the phrase dramatically disrupts this discursiveness both formally and contextually. In fact, it seems apparent that the architectural significance of the position of that verb is precisely calculated to deny responsibility for creating such conventionality in the first place and to parody the very habits of expecting it. It is as if the structure is arguing that 'I learn' should not always mean 'I learn' something, but can also mean various other things such as 'I' 'is' the object of 'learn' ('I' should be learnt not assumed) or 'I' 'is' the meaning of 'learn' (not its grammatical subject). As such, the phrase 'I learn is' also offers visible possibilities for *implicit coherence* inspired internally, by its extremely suggestive structure, insinuating perhaps that the relationship between 'I' (self) and 'is' (being) is always one of evolutionary learning rather than one of factual realities. Both dimensions of meaning; the denied discursive connections (explicit coherence) and the inspired non-discursive connections (*internal implicit coherence*), combine to offer possibilities for *implicit coherence* externally in accordance with the readers' associative relationship to their collective context in the poem.

Here, we have both the vision perpetrated by the hints of connection and conventional meanings, and the illusion incarnated in the denial of conventional meaning; the negatable explicit coherence and the undecidable possibilities for *implicit coherence*. In either, or both, cases, we have the painful doubt of blurriness and the pleasure for the knowledge of our freedom to see the doubt and attempt to derive meanings from it, by it, or as Lyotard argues 'the pleasure that reason should exceed all presentation, the pain that imagination or sensibility should not be equal to the concept' (PMC:81).

Hejinian's style of poetic self-constitution is none-the-more direct or discursive. Sentences like 'My intuition tells me that light is discontinuous' or 'I hear the sounds of the many stones outside the pronouns' imply, and at

the same time diffuse, the contours of their very implied poetic self. Readers are never made fully aware of the conditions upon which the figure 'the light' or the compound figure the 'stones' and 'the sounds' are chosen as opposed to any other natural elements like darkness or the sea.

The self, in the poem's eye, is not developed enough in any of its various formation degrees to allow a process of textual clashing between its presence and absence as is the case in Bernstein's poetics. The reader is kept anticipating vision in which the contours of that self become clarified, however paradoxically, but there is no apparent end to the wait. Superficially, there are definite indications of these contours, the first person pronouns 'I' and 'My', as well as descriptive utterances like 'it wounds the feelings' and 'the room merely tinted'. But with a deeper look, there is, at the same time, an equally strong, but quiet, neutralization of these indications and descriptions in the contextual relationships offered by these phrases' and sentences' own disjunctive sequences. In this way, **the contextual relationships, or the lack of conventional ones, act to neutralize the poem's own implication of a stable poetic self while at the same time suggesting a forthcoming possibility for definite presence continually.** In search for a possible presentation of its 'unpresentable' (PMC:80) meaning, the poetic-self in Hejinian's aesthetic, thus, offers both the anticipatory pleasure for the knowledge of the possibility to apprehend and the anticipatory pain for the failure to apprehend in language what is conceived by sensibility. As Lyotard puts it, 'It will enable us to see by making it impossible to see, it will please but only by causing pain' (PMC:78).

Even in terms of the particle implications of continuity and fusiveness in Hejinian's styles of textual fragmentation, such as her unit of writing and the roles of musicality and humour in her poetics, the Hejinian-esque **contemplative** sublime sentiment of 'pleasure and pain' is strongly suggested and maintained. Consider for example the implied humour in the sequence 'the solitude flared out / Ears – almost every person has some' in terms of the movement between the suggestions of the word 'solitude', which implies seriousness and psychological suffering, and the word 'almost', which implies calm, but witty, playfulness and parody.

The proximity between these two suggestions seem to imply humour, but only as side effect to its *deep parodic* sense of our insistence to connect psychological suffering with *someone to listen*; namely 'ears', thus parodying the mental attitude represented by the sequence of the two sentences as a whole. Yet, neither the sequence itself nor its adjacent sentences and phrases give definite evidence as to the viability of this particular interpretation.

The phrase 'flared out' seems, on the contrary, to suggest that such 'solitude' might itself be meaningless or is itself disappearing which compromises this words' own suggestion of seriousness upon which the humorous implications could be based.

The following sentence seems to assert this compromise by arguing in a totally different, if itself paralogical, direction. In this way, the phrase 'The stain of urgent wordiness on idea life' does not seem either contrasting or harmonious in its own contextualizing sequence, thus neutralizing their definitive humorous edges or effects, while keeping the insinuation of *deep parody* both tentative and, paradoxically, also active. There is a pleasure derived from the fact that we can see, but there is also a loss derived from the fact that we cannot really see. We don't understand quite clearly what is there, but, because of this, we can understand perfectly what is there. The questions we seem able answer are themselves the questions that we cannot really answer, in contemplative, partially playful, *deeply parodic* and sublime feelings of pleasure and pain.

Similarly, Hejinian's non-performative musicality, anti-completion unit of writing, effect the 'sublime' sentiment of pleasure and pain by rejecting the formability conditions upon which their perceivable linguistic presence depends. Their paralogical aspiration after pure presence, after representational justice, like Hejinian's poetic self and signification rationale, is effectively mediated, and paradoxically facilitated, by their insistence on continuity and resistance to formal finality. This is Hejinian's particular form of poetic 'paralogy', 'contradiction', *deep parody*, *implicit coherence* and 'sublime'. It seeks finality, pure and absolute, *in* the very *contemplative* continuation acts that prove its knowledge that there is no finality, as well as in its very acts of emphasizing the freedom of exploring that knowledge in the word-ness of its own world; the language.

Chapter Ten:
The Conclusion,
Hejinian and Bernstein: A Grammar of Differentiality

The twentieth century has given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the communicable and transparent experience. *Jean-François Lyotard (PMC:81-82).*

This thesis hopes to have achieved a step toward the development of a conceptual grammar with which to better understand the differential natures of such postmodern poetics as that of Bernstein and Hejinian. For, in the diverse critical considerations of their work, we have witnessed a return of the desire for objectifying the referent; a growing nostalgia for the illusion of realism. Thus, defining their poetics either as mere textuality (pure materiality and technique), as surface oddities (defamiliarization and obscurity), as revolution (anti-reference, anti-self-expression, anti-genre, anti-accommodational politics, anti-capitalist, pure ideology and pro-theory) or, worse still, as contamination of discourses (schizophrenia, hopeless romanticism and, sometimes-even, madness).

It is clearer now than ever, that increasing superficial visibility by forcing easily digestible categories and familiar explanations limits the significance of this form of postmodern expression to a partial, if hegemonic, version of the aesthetic and social realities it is its business, and ours, to negotiate. The main blindness of these critical approaches has been their automatic linking between discrepancies and triviality, contradictions and insignificance, textual plasticity and political inconsequentiality. Both: in principle, and in the particular poetics of these poets, as we have seen, such qualities are not simply the debasing preludes, but, on the contrary, the forwarding steps for cultural and aesthetic revaluation, re-vision and sometimes-even change. They signify a difference of emphasis in the game of poetics from the modernist notions of order; the whole and the structured, to the postmodern ones of the *differential* and the *multiple* implicating the very question of reality that such demands for realism exist to deny.

Perhaps now we can argue for a conceptual grammar in which one cannot simply make nonsense with language, but rather attempt to conceive of the investigative potentials of its formative impacts on our consciousness of the world; why, how and what meaning is, and is for. A grammar of differentiality, that is, in which there is no escaping multi-dialectical fusions of the separable and the simultaneously inseparable, of the equitable and the simultaneously multiple, of the harmonious and the simultaneously incommensurable and paradoxical. Bernstein's and Hejinian's poetics, this thesis shows, both in terms of their general and more specific individualities, exemplify a hypothesis in the re-legitimation of the 'paralogically' innovative rather than the logically inventive, the unrepresentable rather than the attainable, the 'contradictory' rather than the binary and the linear, the optionally implicit and gestural rather than the explicitly conjunctive, the tangible and the necessary.

We have seen, for example, in chapters 1 and 2 the extent to which this form of differentiability infiltrates and, in a sense, also animates the particular aesthetic and theoretical practices of Bernstein and Hejinian by comparison to the other, equally complex, poetics of conventional and more experimental poets and multi-media artists using language such as Robert Lowell, John Ashbery, William Burroughs, Eugen Gomringer, Robert Lax and John Cage. For Bernstein's and Hejinian's general political and poetic ideals and practices, a different system of cultural and aesthetic relations from that in which they have most often been considered is continually emphasized. With resistance to discursiveness, narrativity and linearity and with emphasis on *implicit coherence* and differentiability, their theoretical and aesthetic practices offer a particular type of socio-poetic consciousness that is enacted in the writing itself. One, in which the nature and possibilities of poetic meaning, and of reality at large, are not given, but questioned and tested. Their generic explorations, for instance, mostly define textual representations of their conceptual emphases on the complex plasticity of these genres with regards to the necessities of the writing moments themselves, rather than valorize the intrinsic usefulness or un-usefulness of classical genres as their critics suggest.

In short, these chapters have attempted to show the ways in which these poets' general political and poetic discourses are neither simply a position in between opposite poles of tension, essentializing undecidability and lacking commitment, nor, a simple compositional mosaic of contrasting impulses, naively equating plurality with detachment and objectivity. But rather, as we have seen, these poets offer their general, and more specific, signatures of differentiability in terms of three basic traits:

1. Complex combinations of various fusions between incommensurable poetic and cultural discourses and qualities, which often maintain continuousness and discontinuousness with the questions and the challenges they pose including their own failures and successes.
2. Multi-dialectical cultural and aesthetic practices and ideals in which both historical continuity and contemporary particularity are concomitant, but, much more significantly, are also concomitantly arguable.
3. A rooted belief in the contingency of reality and in the constitutive influence of language over experience, animated by a profound aspiration after poetic formulations that could be just to those concepts in textual practice.

We have also seen, in chapter 3, the particular grammar that can best elaborate this type of differentiability in terms of this thesis's versions of Lyotard's and Hutcheon's respective concepts of postmodern 'paralogy', the 'sublime', 'irony' and 'contradiction', as well as this thesis's own concept of *deep parody* to add to our previously defined concept of *implicit coherence*. Defining and anticipating the general and the more particular individualities of the Bernstein's and the Hejinian's respective aesthetics, chapter 3 offers a definition of this conceptual grammar as one in which:

1. 'Paralogy' replaces 'invention' as the principal philosophy of cultural and aesthetic legitimation.
2. 'Contradiction' (in terms of the profoundly multiple) replaces 'doubleness' (and binary dialectics) as the main conceptual leitmotif.
3. 'Sublime' effects of conceptual pleasure from conceptual pain replaces the effects of the 'beautiful' as a search for the gratifying and the congenial.
4. *Deep parody*, in terms of a subtle, readership-centred, ironization of habitual patterns of perception implicit in present and past language usage, replaces explicit 'parody' of specific works of literature or art and their implied value systems.
5. This is, of course, to add to chapter 2's definition of these poets' specific type of *implicit coherence* as an optional method of signification offered by the collective suggestive weight of their work's disjunctive textual techniques replacing conventional and more experimental variants of explicit coherence.

And finally, we have seen in parts 4 and 5 the ways in which this grammar also succeeds in elaborating the particular signatures of Hejinian's and Bernstein's poetics. Thirteen major differences between their respective poetics, can perhaps summarize the ways in which this conceptual framework clarifies and consolidates their respective poetic individualities:

1. While the differential conceptual character of Bernstein's poetics offers itself in the form of mistakes in terms of various acts of blending between its component elements (especially pp. 128-29, 133-34), its Hejinian-esque counterpart offers itself in the form of continuous or manifold challenges in terms of calmer, more implicit, but equally strong, fusiveness between its component elements (especially pp. 186-88, 204).

2. Bernstein's poetics depends for its paralogical signification rationale on offering various independent micro completions of meanings in a measured acrobatic play of definition and re-definition using the element of surprise and the deliberate exactness of its paradoxical form (especially pp. 128, 145-48). Hejinian's poetics, by contrast, depends for its similarly paralogical signification rationale on various escalations of meanings, each stretching the other, in a less-controlled (or random) contortionist play of challenge and re-challenge to the contours of the meanings suggested (especially pp. 187, 193, 217-18).
3. While Bernstein's poetic self offers its 'enunciating' and 'ex-centric' (POP:57,75) identity through textual fusions between its states of presence and absence (especially pp. 122, 128, 131-33), Hejinian's offers it through an indefinite continuation of form and buoyancy of vision (especially pp. 203-207)
4. Bernstein's poetics offers one form of *implicit coherence* suggested externally by the act of readership according to his works' counterbalancing suggestive structures and anti-narrative techniques (especially pp. 155-58). Hejinian's poetics, by comparison, offers two forms of *implicit coherence*. They are suggested both internally and externally according to her works' particular employment of both the memory based, and the detached observatory, levels of signification simultaneously (especially pp. 187-90, 206).
5. While Hejinian's poetic use of 'contradiction', as the multiple, appears in her poetics' inherently fusive (rather than blending) signature of signification (especially p. 189), Bernstein's use of it appears in his poetics' aspiration after a superficial zero-effect of signification in which contrasting (rather than unfinished) suggestions destabilize internal lines of signification (especially pp. 130-134).
6. Bernstein's poetics utilizes two forms of *deep parody*. The first is only subtly ironic, general and less referential. The second is satiric, particularly humorous and much more referential (especially pp. 153-55). In their parodic textual processes, both types quote their target language-uses themselves as representations of the kind of perceptual habits they ironize and critique (especially p. 138). Hejinian's poetics, by contrast, offers one form of *deep parody*, but much more implicitly and generally than Bernstein's two types, inasmuch as it typically quotes the structural patternology of those language uses, rather than the language uses themselves (especially p. 211).

7. While Bernstein's poetics offers two stages of development; an early predominantly readerly poetics (1970s and 1980s) and a late predominantly performerly poetics (1990s to present) (especially pp. 149, 159-64), Hejinian's offers two levels of generic definition all through her poetic career. These are; a biographical level offered by the retrospective, or the memory-based, impulse of signification in her writing and a self-critical one offered by her work's introspective observations of the moments of realizations of those meanings themselves (especially pp. 185-88, 199-201).
8. While the combination between Bernstein's two stages of developments suggests his poetry's recent transformation into the more usual performative orality that his early poetics rejects (especially pp. 159-61), the combination between these two levels of signification in Hejinian's poetics defines it beyond its usual generic classification as autobiography and demonstrates its readerly, rather than performerly, poetics (especially pp. 192-94, 212-13, 219).
9. Bernstein's early readerly poetics of the 1970s and 1980s features a particularly acute density of textual and contextual effects that is generally undeceiving in its deliberate fracturing and deformation of conventional poetic language and syntax (especially pp. 146, 160). By comparison, Hejinian's predominantly readerly poetics offers a particularly sombre or contemplative density of textual and contextual effects (such as calmer phrasal movements, longer and more grammatically correct phrasal structures, superficially harmonious formal transitions) that appears generally deceiving in its harbouring of an equally strong challenge to conventional poetic sequence, structuredness and discursiveness (especially pp. 187, 209-10, 216-19).
10. Bernstein's poetics utilizes a minimal unit of writing (the phrase or the sentence) from its early to its late stages, as means by which to differentially and contradictorily break the hold of conventional discursive syntax and grammar (especially p. 160). Hejinian's, by comparison, randomly alternates between various units of writing (the letter, the phrase, the sentence and the paragraph) as means by which to differentially and contradictorily enact the dilemma of the meaning of continuity, as opposed to conventional conceptions of meaning finality and formability (especially pp. 208-09, 214-18).

11. While humour, visible musicality and satire play important roles in Bernstein's poetics, particularly in his performerly, but equally differential, stages of the 1990s (especially pp. 156-58), they play comparatively secondary roles in Hejinian's predominantly contemplative, but equally contradictory, aesthetics (especially pp. 218-20).

12. Bernstein's aesthetic concept of language defines its wordness as the medium of consciousness while attempting to escape it for extra linguistic meaning (especially pp. 138, 142, 147). Hejinian's, by comparison, involves the meaning of time as a necessary attribute in the formation of meaning in consciousness and therefore endeavours, not to escape it as such, but to follow the continuity of its processes of being. Thus, both Bernstein's and Hejinian's individual poetics effectively challenge 'the transparency of language' (CD:70) and explore the 'epistemological relationships that hold time to language and language to time' (LOI:22) (especially pp. 196, 209).

13. As such while Bernstein's poetics defines his signature tone of the 'sublime' as playful in a serious way (especially pp. 168, 174, 175), Hejinian's defines hers as contemplative, introspective and sometimes philosophical, in a playful way (especially pp. 224, 227-8).

It is this sort of differentiability in the 'sublime', 'paralogical', 'contradictory', *deeply parodic* and *implicitly coherable* impulses of Hejinian and Bernstein's general and more specific cultural and aesthetic personalities that urges us to reconsider the so-called postmodern crisis of meaning. Claimed to describe much contemporary artistic and theoretical expressions, this alleged crisis is perhaps better termed as the crisis of the insistence on discursive meanings. We can no longer afford to forget that failures in the making of sense, aesthetic or cultural, are, by nature, also failures in the pre-requisite definition of that very sense. That, our identities, defined by the principal condition of our very social becoming; language, are much less the romantic factualities they are often made to be, than the complex questions and textualities their daily variability offers them to be. Else, there would be a return of the terror to objectify reality and classify our beings accordingly. The struggle against totality has only just begun. We must continue it by upholding the unrepresentable that cannot be reified or discursively attained and by activating the differentials and their games of re-legitimation and continuous re-definition. But, above all, we must remember that in the successes of our failures to make meaning, just as much as in the failures of our successes to make meaning, there are always potentials for meaning.

Bibliography

1. Primary Sources

Bernstein, Charles, Controlling Interests (New York: Roof, 1980).

Bernstein, Charles, Interviewed by Tom Beckett, The Difficulties: Charles Bernstein's Issue, Vol. 2, no. 1 (Fall, 1982).

Bernstein, Charles (ed. & intro.), 'The Language Sampler', The Paris Review, no. 86 (Winter, 1982).

Bernstein, Charles, Islets / Irritations (New York: Roof, 1983).

Bernstein, Charles, & Bruce, Andrews (eds. & intro.), The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984).

Bernstein, Charles, 'For Change' in In the American Tree: Language, Realism, Poetry (Orono: The National Poetry Foundation at the University of Maine, 1986).

Bernstein, Charles, Content's Dream: Essays 1975 – 1984 (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1986).

Bernstein, Charles, The Sophist (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1987).

Bernstein, Charles, Rough Trades (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1991).

Bernstein, Charles, A Poetics (Cambridge, MA. & London: Harvard University Press, 1992).

Bernstein, Charles, Dark City (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1994).

Bernstein, Charles, My Way: Speeches and Poems (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).

Bernstein, Charles, Interviewed by Hannah Mockel-Reike, My Way (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

Bernstein, Charles, The Republics of Reality: 19975 – 1995 (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 2000).

Bernstein, Charles, a conversation with the author on the peripheries of the conference Language / poetry / Performance, De Montfort University, Leicester, the UK, Friday 8th, to Saturday the 9th, December 2000.

Hejinian, Lyn, 'If Writing Is Writing' in The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book, Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews (eds.), (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984).

Hejinian, Lyn, Redo (Grenada, Miss: Salt-Works Press, 1984) in The Cold of Poetry (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1994).

Hejinian, Lyn, The Guard (1984) in The Cold of Poetry (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1994).

Hejinian, Lyn, 'The Rejection of Closure' in Poetics Journal, no. 4 (May, 1984), also in Writing / Talks, Bob Perelman (ed.), (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University press, 1985).

Hejinian, Lyn, 'for Change' in In the American Tree: Language, Realism, Poetry (Orono: The National Poetry Foundation at the University of Maine, 1986).

Hejinian, Lyn, Gesualdo (Berkeley, CA: Tuumba Press, 1987) in The Cold of Poetry (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1994).

Hejinian, Lyn, Writing Is an Aid to Memory (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1996), first published by (New York: The figures, 1978).

Hejinian, Lyn, 'Strangeness', Poetics Journal, no.8 (June, 1989).

Hejinian, Lyn, My Life (1980) (1987), (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1991).

Hejinian, Lyn, Oxota: A Short Russian Story (Massachusetts: The Figures, 1991).

Hejinian, Lyn, 'The Poetics of Everyday Life', Poetics Journal, no. 9 (June, 1991).

Hejinian, Lyn, (with Ron Silliman, Barrett Watten, Michael Davidson), Leningrad: American Writers in the Soviet Union (San Francisco, CA: Mercury House, 1991).

Hejinian, Lyn, 'Ground' in The Cold of Poetry (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1994).

Hejinian, Lyn, 'The Person' in The Cold of Poetry (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1994).

Hejinian, Lyn, Guide, Grammar, Watch, and The Thirty Nights (Western Australia: Folio (Salt), 1996).

Hejinian, Lyn, Interviewed by Larry McCaffery and Brian McHale in Some Other Frequency: Interviews with Innovative American Authors, Larry McCaffery (ed.), (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

Hejinian, Lyn, Interviewed by Laura Hinton, Private arts, no. 10 (Spring, 1996).

Hejinian, Lyn, Letter to author, May 17th, 1999.

Hejinian, Lyn, Happily (California: The Post-Apollo Press, 2000).

Hejinian, Lyn, 'The Rejection of Closure', Manuscript of The Language of Inquiry (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2000).

Hejinian, Lyn, The Language of Inquiry (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2000).

Hutcheon, Linda, A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction (New York and London: Routledge, 1988).

Hutcheon, Linda, The Politics of Postmodernism (London & New York: Routledge, 1989).

Hutcheon, Linda, 'Theorizing the Postmodern' in The Post-Modern Reader, Charles Jencks (ed. & intro.), (London & New York: Academy Editions, 1992).

Lyotard, Jean-François, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Trans.), (Minnesota and Manchester, U.K.: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

Lyotard, Jean-François, 'The Sublime and The Avant-Garde', ARTFORM, Vol. XXII, no. 8 (April, 1984).

Lyotard, Jean-François, The Differend: Phrases In Dispute, George Van Den Abeele (trans.), (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

Lyotard, Jean-François, 'Notes on the Meaning of Post-' in Postmodernism: A Reader, Thomas Docherty (ed.), (New York & London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993).

Lyotard, Jean-François, Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime, Elizabeth Rottenberg (trans.), (California: Stanford University Press, 1991).

Lyotard, Jean-François, 'Resisting a Discourse of Mastery: A Conversation with Jean-François Lyotard' in Women Writing Culture, Gary A. Olson & Elizabeth Hirsh (eds.), (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995).

2. Secondary Sources

Abbot, Steve, 'Language Poets: An Introduction', Poetry Flash, no. 74 (May, 1979).

Abbott, Steve, 'Review of Hejinian's *Writing Is an Aid to Memory* (1987)', American Book Review, Vol. 4, no. 2 (January / February, 1982).

Altieri, Charles, 'Without Consequence Is No Politics: A Response to Jerome McGann' in Politics & Poetic Value, Robert Von Hallberg (ed.), (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), also in Critical Inquiry, Vol.13, no. 3 (Spring, 1987).

Altieri, Charles, 'Lyn Hejinian and the Possibilities of Postmodernism in Poetry' in Women Poets of the Americas: Toward a Pan-American Gathering, Jacqueline Vaught Brogan & Cordelia Chavez Candelaria (eds.), (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).

Altieri, Charles, 'The Transformation of Objectivism: An Afterward' in The Objectivist Nexus: Essays in Cultural Poetics, Rachel Blau DuPlessis & Peter Quartermain (eds.), (Tuscaloosa & London: The University of Alabama Press, 1999).

Armantrout, Rae, 'The Guard by Lyn Hejinian', How(ever), Vol. 2, no. 2 (February, 1985), Internet journal: http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/however/print_archive/alerts0285.html

Ashbery, John, Interviewed by Piotr Sommer in Code of Signals: Recent Writings in Poetics, Michael Palmer (ed.), (California / Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1983).

Ashbery, John, Rivers and Mountains (New York: The Ecco Press, 1977).

Baker, Peter, 'Review of Bernstein's *A Poetics*', College Literature, Vol. 20, no. 2 (June, 1993).

Bann, Stephen (ed.), Concrete Poetry: An International Anthology (London: London Magazine Editions, 1967).

Bartlett, Lee, 'What Is Language Poetry', Critical Inquiry, Vol. 12, no. 4 (Summer, 1986).

Baym, Nina (ed. & intro.), The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Vol. 2 (New York & London: Norton Company, 1998), Fifth Edition.

Beach, Christopher, ABC of Influence: Ezra Pound and the Re-making of the American Poetic Tradition (Berkeley & Oxford: University of California Press, 1992).

Beach, Christopher, 'Poetic Positioning: Stephen Dobyns and Lyn Hejinian in Cultural Context', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 38, no. 1 (Spring, 1997).

Brennan, Joe, 'A=r=t M=e=a=n=s', Flashpoint, Web-Issue no. 1 (Spring, 1991): <http://www.flashpointmag.com/index1.htm>

Bromwich, David, 'Comment: Without Admonition', in Politics and Poetic Value, Robert Von Hallberg (ed.), (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), also published in Critical Inquiry, Vol. 13, no. 3 (Spring, 1987).

Burroughs, William & Gysin, Brion, The Third Mind (London: John Calder, 1979).

Burroughs, William & Gysin, Brion, The Exterminator (San Francisco: Dave Haselwood Books, 1967).

Burroughs, William, The Job, An Interview with Daniel Odier (ed.), (New York & London: Penguin Books, 1969).

Cage, John, A Year From Monday: New Lectures and Writings (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1967).

Cage, John, Silence (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961, 1973).

Cage, John, 'After Antiquity'; A Conversation with Peter Gena (1982) in A John Cage Reader, Peter Gena & Jonathon Brent (eds.), (New York: C.F. Peters, 1982).

Cage, John, Interviewed by Nicholas Zurbrugg, Art & Design, profile no. 45 (London, 1995).

Cazé, Antoine, 'Form as Freedom in the Poetry of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Group' in Freedom and Form: Essays in Contemporary American Poetry, Esther Giger and Agnieszka Salska (eds.), (Łódź, Poland: University of Łódź Press, 1988)

Clark, Hilary, 'The Mnemonics of Autobiography', Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly, Vol. 14, no. 4 (Fall, 1991).

Clark, Tom, 'Stalin As linguist', Partisan Review, (Spring, 1987).

Davidson, Michael, 'Letter to Weinberger' November 22nd, 1987, Sulfur, no. 22 (Spring, 1988).

Davidson, Michael, The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid Century (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Davidson, Michael, ' "Skewed by Design": From Act to Speech Act in Language-Writing', Fragment, no. 2 (Autumn, 1990).

Davidson, Michael, (with Lyn Hejinian, Ron Silliman, and Barrett Watten), Leningrad: American Writers In the Soviet Union (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1991).

De George, Richard T., 'Anarchism' in The Oxford Companion to Philosophy, Ted Honderrich (ed.), (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Derrida, Jacques, Of Grammatology, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (trans.), (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

Derrida, Jacques, Writing and Difference, Allan Bass (trans, intro, notes), (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978).

Derrida, Jacques, Acts of Literature, Derek Attridge (eds.), (New York & London: Routledge, 1992).

De Saussure, Ferdinand, Course in General Linguistics (1919), Roy Harris (trans.), (Illinois: Open Court, 1988), Third Edition.

DuPlessis, Rachel Blau, 'On the Davidson / Weinberger Exchange', in Sulfur, no. 22 (Spring, 1988).

Dworkin, Craig Douglas, 'Penelope Reworking the Twill: Patchwork, Writing, and Lyn Hejinian's 'My Life'', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 36, no. 1 (Spring, 1995).

Edwards, Ken, 'Language: The Remake', Fragment, no. 2 (Autumn, 1990).

Esdal, Logan, 'This Poetry Which Is Not One', LAGNIAPPE, Vol. 2, no. 2 (Spring / Summer, 2000), Internet journal: <http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~foust/lagniappe.html>

Eshleman, Clayton, 'Comment on the Davidson / Weinberger Exchange', Sulfur, no. 22 (Spring, 1988).

Finlay, Ian Hamilton, Interviewed by Paul Crowther, 'Classicism, Piety and Nature', Art & Design, profile no: 36 (1994).

Finlay, Ian Hamilton, Interviewed by Nicholas Zurbrugg, Art & Design, Profile no: 45 (1995).

Fredman, Stephen, Poet's Prose: The Crisis in American Verse (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Freitag, Kornelia, "*A pause, a rose, something on paper*": Autobiography as Language Writing In Lyn Hejinian's *My Life*', Amerikastudien, American Studies, Vol. 43, no. 2 (1998).

Friedlander, Benjamin, 'Poetics, Polemic, and the Question of Intelligibility', Postmodern Culture: An Electronic Journal of Interdisciplinary Criticism, Vol. 9, no. 1 (September, 1998).

Gelpi, Albert, 'The Genealogy of Postmodernism: Contemporary American Poetry', The Southern Review, Vol.26, no. 3 (Summer, 1990).

Gilbert, Roger, 'Textured Information: Politics, Pleasure and Poetry in the Eighties', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 33, no. 3 (Summer, 1992).

Golding, Alan, From Outlaw To Classic: Canons in American Poetry (Wisconsin / London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).

Golding, Alan, 'Review of Linda Reinfeld's Language Poetry: Writing as Rescue', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 35, no. 1 (Spring, 1994).

Gomringer, Eugen, 'From Line to Constellations' (1954), 'Concrete Poetry' (1956), 'Max Bill and Concrete Poetry' (1958), 'The Poem As A Functional Object' (1960) in Concrete Poetry: A World View, Mary Ellen Solt (ed. & intro.), (Bloomington / London: Indiana University Press, 1968).

Gray, Richard, American Poetry of the Twentieth Century (New York & London: Longman, 1990).

Greer, Michael, 'Ideology and Theory in Recent Experimental Writing or, The Naming of "Language Poetry"', Boundary 2, Vol. 16, no. 2 / 3 (1989).

Habermas, Jürgen, 'Modernity: An Unfinished Project' (1981) in Postmodernism: A Reader, Charles Jencks (ed.), (New York & London: Academy Editions, 1992).

Hassan, Ihab, The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1987).

Hartley, George, Textual Politics and the Language Poets (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

Heidegger, Martin, Being and Time (1953), Joan Stambaugh (trans.), (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996).

Henry, Brian, 'Review of Bernstein's My Way', LAGNIAPPE, Vol. 1, no. 3 (Summer, 1999), Internet journal: <http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~foust/lagniappe.html>

Hightower, Scott, 'Review of Bernstein's My Way', Library Journal, Vol. 124, no. 2 (February, 1999).

Hinton, Laura, 'Centering Margins: The Language Poets Reconsidered (as Women)', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 41, no. 1 (Spring, 2000).

Hoover, Paul (ed. & intro.), Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994).

Jameson, Fredric, Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (New York and London: Duke University Press, 1991).

Jarraway, David, "'My Life' Through the Eighties: The Exemplary L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E of Lyn Hejinian", Contemporary Literature, Vol. 33, no. 2 (Summer, 1992).

Joris, Pierre, 'Review of Bernstein's Rough Trades', American Book Review, (Feb./March 1993), Internet version: <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/bernstein/reviews/abr-joris.html>

Kalaidjian, Walter, American Culture Between the Wars: Revisionary Modernism & Postmodern Critique (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

Kalstone, David, 'The Uses of History' in Robert Lowell, Harold Bloom (ed.), (New York: Chelsea House, 1987).

Kant, Immanuel, Critique of Practical Reason, Lewis White Beck (trans.), (New York: Macmillan, 1956).

Kant, Immanuel, Critique of Pure Reason, N. Kemp Smith (trans.), (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1929).

Kant, Immanuel, Critique of Judgement, J. H. Bernard (trans.), (New York: McMillan, 1951).

Kelleher, Mike, 'Charles Bernstein in the 20th Century: A Brief Revue of Poetic Values', The Transcendental Friend, no. 11 (September, 1999), Internet journal: <http://www.morningred.com/friend/1999/09/pages/review.html>

Kellog, David, 'Microreviews', Boston Review, (April / May, 2001), Internet version: <http://bostonreview.mit.edu/BR26.2/contents.html>

Kim, Eleana, 'Language Poetry: Dissident Practices and the Makings of a Movement', read me, no. 4 (Spring / Summer, 2001), Internet journal: <http://home.ips.net/~nada/language1.htm>

Kirby, David, 'The Poetry Scene Today', The Writer, Vol. 107, no. 3 (March, 1994).

Kostelanetz, Richard, 'Picketing the Zeitgeist', American Book Review, Vol. 21, no. 4 (June, 2000).

Kutnik, Jerzy, 'Postmodern Language-Centred Writing and the Question of Ideology: A Polish Perspective', Journal of American Studies of Turkey, no. 4 (Fall, 1996).

Lacan, Jacque, The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis, Anthony Wilden (trans. & notes), (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1968).

Lavender, William, 'Disappearance of Theory, Appearance of Praxis: Ron Silliman, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, and the Essay', Poetics Today, Vol. 17, no. 2 (Summer, 1996).

Lawson, Andrew, 'The Short Revolution? Reassessing Language Writing', Fragmente, no. 2 (Autumn, 1990).

Lax, Robert, New Poems (New York: Journeyman Press, 1962), reprinted in New Poems: 1962 / 1985 (London: Coracle Press / Ottenhausen Verlag, 1986).

Lax, Robert, Fables (New York: Journeyman Press, 1970).

Lax, Robert, Interviewed by Nicholas Zurbrugg, in The ABCs of Robert Lax, David Miller and Nicholas Zurbrugg (eds.), (London: Stride, 1999).

Lax, Robert, Interviewed by David Miller in The ABCs of Robert Lax, David Miller and Nicholas Zurbrugg (eds.), (London: Stride, 1999).

Lazer, Hank, Opposing Poetries: Volume One. Issues and Institutions (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1996)

Lazer, Hank, Opposing Poetries, Volume Two: Readings (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1996).

Lowell, Robert, Lord Weary's Castle (1946), renewed (1974) in The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Vol. 2, Nina Baym (ed.), (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company 1998), Fifth Edition.

- Lewis, Joel, 'Ink Mathematics: An Introduction to Language Poetry', Poets & Writers, Vol. 18, no. 5 (September / October, 1990).
- Mac Low, Jackson, 'Language-Centered' in L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, Vol. 4, Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews (eds. & intro.), Open Letter, fifth series, no. 1 (Winter, 1982).
- Mac Low, Jackson, 'Charles Bernstein & His Shade', The Difficulties: Charles Bernstein's Issue, Vol. 2, no. 1 (Fall, 1982).
- Mann, Paul, 'Review Of Leningrad', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 35, no. 1 (Spring, 1994).
- Mann, Paul, 'Review of The Politics of Poetic Form', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 35, no. 1 (Spring, 1994).
- Martin, Stephen-Paul, 'Reading in the Words', American Book Review, Vol. 9, no. 4 (September / October, 1987).
- Martin, Stephen-Paul, 'Paradigm Lost: Ron Silliman 's Paradise and the Archaeology of Language' Sagetrieb: A Journal Devoted to Poets in the imagist / Objectivist Tradition, Vol. 8, no. 1 / 2 (Fall, 1989).
- McGann, Jerome, 'Contemporary Poetry, Alternate Route', Critical Inquiry, Vol. 13, no. 3 (Spring, 1987).
- McGann, Jerome, 'Response to Charles Altieri' in Politics & Poetic Value, Robert Von Hallberg (ed.), (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
- McGann, Jerome (ed. & intro.), 'Postmodern Poetries', Verse, Vol. 7, no.1 (Spring, 1990).
- McHale, Brian, 'Creative Misinterpretations', American Book Review, Vol. 15, no. 1 (April / May, 1993).
- Mengham, Rod, 'Untitled Review in Textual Practice, Vol. 3, no. 1 (Spring, 1989).
- Messerli, Douglas (Intro. & ed.), "Language" Poetries: An Anthology (New York: New Directions, 1987).
- Monaghan, Patricia, 'My Way: Speeches and Poems, A Review', Booklist, Vol. 95, no. 8 (December 15th, 1998).
- Monaghan, Patricia, 'Review of Dark City', Booklist, Vol. 90, no. 18 (May 15th, 1994).
- Morgan, Edwin 'Language, Poetry, & Language Poetry', Edinburgh Review, no.97 (Spring, 1997).
- Nathanson, Tenney, 'Collage and Pulverization in Contemporary American Poetry: Charles Bernstein's Controlling Interests', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 33, no. 2 (Summer, 1992).
- Naylor, Paul, '(Mis) Characterizing Charlie: Language and The Self in the Poetry and Poetics of Charles Bernstein', Sagetrieb, Vol. 14, no. 3 (Winter, 1995).
- Nealon, Jeffery T., Double Reading: Postmodernism After Deconstruction (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1993).
- Nicholas, Peter, 'John Ashbery and Language Poetry' in Poetry and the Sense of Panic: Critical Essays on Elizabeth Bishop and John Ashbery, Lionel Kelly (ed.), (Amsterdam & Atlanta: Costerus New Series, Rodopi Press, 2000).
- Olson, Charles, 'Projective Verse'(1951) in The Poetics of the New American Poetry, Donald Allen and Warren Tallman (eds.), (New York: Grove Press, 1973).
- Osborn, Andrew, 'Review of My Way', Chicago Review, (Summer / Fall, 1999).
- Palattella, John, 'Review of A Poetics', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 35, no. 1 (Spring, 1994).

Palattella, John, 'Microreviews', Boston Review, (April / May, 2001), Internet version:
<http://bostonreview.mit.edu/BR26.2/contents.html>

Paquin, Ethan, 'Microreviews', Boston Review, (April / May, 2001), Internet version:
<http://bostonreview.mit.edu/BR26.2/contents.html>

Perelman, Bob, 'The First Person', Hills no. 6 / 7 (Spring, 1980).

Perelman, Bob, 'A Note on "Sentences My Father Used"', The Difficulties: Charles Bernstein's Issue, Vol. 2, no. 1 (Fall, 1982).

Perelman, Bob (ed. & intro.), Writing / Talks (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985).

Perelman Bob, (with Lyn Hejinian, Ron Silliman, Steve Benson, Barrett Watten, and Charles Bernstein), 'for Change' in In the American Tree: Language, Realism, Poetry (Orono: The National Poetry Foundation at the University of Maine, 1986).

Perelman, Bob, Captive Audience (New York: The Figures, 1988).

Perelman, Bob, 'Parataxis and Narrative: The New Sentence in Theory and Practice', American Literature, Vol. 65, no. 2 (June, 1993).

Perelman, Bob, The Marginalization of Poetry: Language Writing and Literary History (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Perloff, Marjorie, The Poetic Art of Robert Lowell (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973).

Perloff, Marjorie, The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

Perloff, Marjorie, 'The Word As Such: L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Poetry in the Eighties' in The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1985).

Perloff, Marjorie, Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Perloff, Marjorie, 'How Russian Is It: Lyn Hejinian's Oxota', Parnassus: Long Poem Issue, no. 17 (Spring, 1993).

Perloff, Marjorie, 'John Cage's Dublin, Lyn Hejinian's Leningrad: Poetic Cities as Cybercities' in Classical, Renaissance, and Postmodern Acts of Imagination: Essays Commemorating O. B. Hardison, Jr. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996).

Perloff, Marjorie, 'Language Poetry and the Lyric Subject: Ron Silliman's Albany, Susan Howe's Buffalo', Critical Inquiry, Vol. 25, no. 3 (Spring, 1999).

Perloff, Marjorie, 'After Language Poetry: Innovation and Its Theoretical discontents' (1999), Internet version:
http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/perloff/after_langpo.html

Perloff, Marjorie, 'Happy World: What Lyn Hejinian's Poetry Tells Us About Chance, Fortune, and Pleasure', Boston Review, Vol. 25 (February / March, 2000), Internet version:
<http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/perloff/articles/hejinian.html>

Piombino, Nick, 'Writing, Identity And The Self', The Difficulties: Charles Bernstein's Issue, Vol. 2, no. 1 (Fall, 1982), p.49.

Pohl, R. D., 'Review of Republics of Reality', The Buffalo News, May 7th, 2000.

Preminger, Alex and Brogan, T.V.F. (eds.), The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

Publisher Weekly Vol. 241, no. 35 (August 29th, 1994).

Publisher Weekly Vol, 239, no. 53 (December 7th, 1992).

Publisher Weekly Vol. 247, no. 13 (March 27th, 2000).

Publisher Weekly Vol. 241, no. 13 (March 28th, 1994).

Quartermain, Peter, 'Syllable as Music: Lyn Hejinian's *Writing Is An Aid to Memory*', Sagetrieb, Vol. 11, no. 3 (Winter, 1992).

Quinn, Paul, 'Rattling the Chains of Free Verse', Times Literary Supplement, Friday April 30th, 1999.

Rashwan, Nagy, Ian Hamilton Finlay and the Post-modern Impulse, DeMontfort University postgraduate Library, Leicester LE1 9BH, U.K.

Rasula, Jed, 'The Politics of, the Politics in' in Politics and Poetic Value, Robert Von Hallberg (ed.), (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

Riggs, Thomas (ed.), Contemporary Poets (New York and London: St. James Press, 1996), Sixth Edition.

Reinfeld, Linda, Language Poetry. Writing as Rescue (Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

Samuels, Lisa, 'Eight Justifications for Canonizing Lyn Hejinian's My Life', Modern Language Studies, Vol. 27, no. 2 (1997).

Schultz, Susan M., 'Postmodern Promos' (1999), Internet version:
http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/schultz/a_poetics.html

Schultz, Susan M., 'Of Time and Charles Bernstein's Lines: A Poetics of Fashion Statements', Jacket, no. 14 (July, 2001), Internet journal: <http://jacketmagazine.com/14/schultz-bernstein.html>

Sharkey, John J. (ed. & intro.), Mindplay: An Anthology of British Concrete Poetry (London: Lorrimer Publishing, 1971).

Sherry, James, 'A Letter to Tom Beckett', September 23rd, 1981, The Difficulties: Charles Bernstein's Issue, Vol. 2, no. 1 (Fall, 1982).

Shetley, Vernon, After the Death of Poetry: Poet and Audience in Contemporary America (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1993).

Shivers, James, 'Review of Close Listening', Washington Review On Line, Vol. 24, no. 4 (December / January, 1998 / 99): <http://washingtonreview.com/xxxiv4:htm>

Silliman, Ron, The New Sentence (New York: Roof, 1977).

Silliman, Ron, Tjanting (Berkeley, CA: The Figures, 1981).

Silliman, Ron, 'Realism: An Anthology of Language Writing', Ironwood 20, Vol. 10, no. 2 (Fall, 1982).

Silliman, Ron, Lit (Connecticut, USA: Poets & Poets Press, 1987).

Silliman, Ron, 'Negative Solidarity: Revisionism and "New American" Poetics', Sulfur, no. 22 (Spring, 1988).

Silliman, Perelman, Hejinian, Watten, Benson and Harryman, 'Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry', Social Text, no. 19 / 20 (Fall, 1989).

Silliman, Ron, (ed. & intro.), In the American Tree: Language, Realism, Poetry (Orono: The National Poetry Foundation at the University of Maine, 1986).

Silliman, Ron, 'Canons and Institutions: New Hope for the Disappeared' in The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy, Charles Bernstein (ed. & intro.), (New York: Roof, 1990).

Silliman, Ron, 'Wild Form' (2000) Internet piece: <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/silliman/wildform>

Simpson, Megan, Poetic Epistemologies: Gender and Knowing in Women's Language-Orientated Writing (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000).

Sobieszek, Robert A., Ports of Entry: William S. Burroughs and the Arts (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Musium of Arts, 1996).

Soldofsky, Alan, 'Language and Narcissism', Poetry Flash, no. 74 (May, 1979).

Solt, Mary Ellen (ed. & intro.), Concrete Poetry: A World View (London: Indiana University Press, 1970) Second Edition.

Spahr, Juliana, 'Resignifying Autobiography: Lyn Hejinian's My Life', American Literature, Vol. 68, no. 1 (March, 1996).

Stefans, Brian Kim, 'Lyn Hejinian ' *Happily* ', LAGNIAPPE, Vol. 2, no. 1 (Fall, 1999), Internet journal: <http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~foust/lagniappe.html> ,

Stein, Gertrude, 'Narration: Lecture 2' in The Poetics of the New American Poetry, Donald Allen & Warren Tallman (eds.), (New York: Grove Press, 1973).

Stein, Gertrude, 'Tender Buttons' in Revolution of the Word, Jerome Rothenberg (ed.), (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974).

Sterba, James P., 'Political Philosophy' in The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, Robert Audi (ed.), (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Turner, Charles, 'Lyotard and Weber: Postmodern Rules and Neo-Kantian Values'(1990) in Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity, Bryan S. Turner (ed. & intro.), (London: Sage,1990).

Tiffany, Daniel, 'The Rhetoric of Materiality', Sulfur, no. 22 (Spring, 1988).

Treacle, Geoffrey, 'Language Review', Chicago Review, (Summer / Fall, 1999).

Tuma, Keith, 'Contemporary American Poetry and the Pseudo Avant-Garde', Chicago Review, Vol. 36, no. 3 / 4 (Summer / Fall, 1998).

Vickery, Ann, 'Leaving Lines of Gender: A Feminist Genealogy of Language writing', HOW 2, Vol. 1, no. 4 (September, 2000), Internet journal: http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/however/v1_4_2000/current/readings/vickery.html

Ward, Diane, 'Tentativity, Some Notes On Charles Bernstein's Style', The Difficulties: Charles Bernstein's Issue, Vol. 2, no. 1 (Fall, 1982).

Ward, Geoff, Language Poetry and the American Avant-Garde (London: The British Association for American Studies, 1993).

Ward, Geoff, 'My Way: Speeches and Poems', A Review', Boston Review, (October / November, 1999), Internet version: <http://bostonreview.mit.edu/BR24.5/ward.html>

Ward, Geoff, 'Before and After Language: The New American Poetry' in Poetry and the Sense of Panic: Critical Essays on Elizabeth Bishop and John Ashbery, Lionel Kelly (ed.), (Amsterdam & Atlanta: Costerus New Series, Rodopi Press, 2000).

Weber, Max, From Max Weber (London: Routledge, 1948).

Weber, Max, The Methodology of the Social Sciences (New York: Free Press, 1949).

Weber, Max, Roscher and Kneis (New York: Free Press, 1975).

Weinberger, Eliot, 'A Note On Montemora, America & The World', Sulfur, no. 20 (Fall, 1987), also in his book Written Reaction: Poetics, Politics, Polemics (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1996).

Wheale, Nigel (ed. & intro.), The Postmodern Arts: An Introductory Reader (New York & London: Routledge, 1995).

Williams, James, Lyotard: Towards a Postmodern Philosophy (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998)

Williams, William Carlos, 'Edgar Allen Poe', 'The Work of Gertrude Stein', 'Introduction to the Wedge', 'William Carlos Williams to Robert Creeley' in The Poetics of the New American Poetry, Donald Allen & Warren Tallman (eds.), (New York: Grove Press, 1973).

Williams, William Carlos, 'Spring and All' in Revolution of the Word, Jerome Rothenberg (ed.), (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974).

Williams, William Carlos, 'The Desert Music' in American Poetry Since the 1950s, Eliot Weinberger (ed.) (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1993).

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, Philosophical Investigations, G. E. M. Anscombe (trans.), G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees (eds.), (New Jersey & London: Prentice Hall, 1953).

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, Philosophical Grammar, Parts 1 and 2, Rush Rhees (ed.), Anthony Kenny (trans.), (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974).

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, On Certainty, Desi Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (trans.), G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. Von Wright (eds.), (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1969).

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, Philosophical Occassions 1912-1951, James Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (eds.), (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993).

Wood, Tim, 'Charles Bernstein: Politics, Poetics, and Laughter Against Tears, An Interview', ArtsDFW.com.net.org, (April, 2000), Internet journal: http://www.artsdfw.com/article.phtml?id_serial=343

Yu, Timothy, 'Form and Identity in Language Poetry and Asian American Poetry', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 41, no. 3 (Fall, 2000).

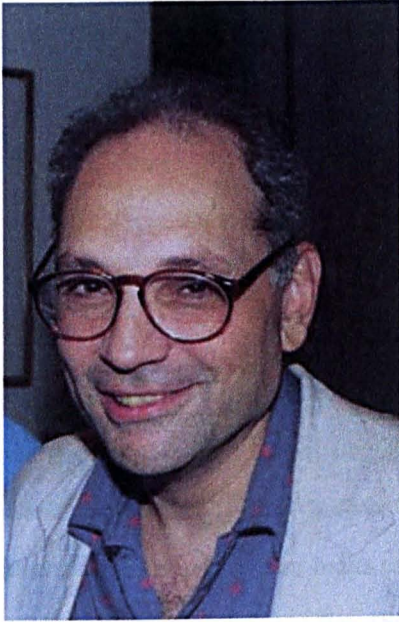
Zukofsky, Louis, 'A Statement For Poetry' in The Poetics of the New American Poetry, Donald Allen & Warren Tallman (eds.), (New York: Grove Press, 1973).

Zukofsky, Louis, 'Two Songs' in Revolution of the Word, Jerome Rothenberg (ed.), (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974).

Zukofsky, Louis, ' "A" 11-15' in American Poetry Since the 1950s, Eliot Weinberger (ed.), (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1993).

Appendix I
Biographical Notes

1. Charles Bernstein



Charles Bernstein¹ was born in New York City on April 4th, 1950. Graduating from Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1972 with a Bachelor degree in philosophy, Bernstein initially worked as a writer on medical and health topics. His first book of poetry, Asylums, was published by Asylum Press in 1975 and his second, Parsing, by the same Press in the following year. In 1977, Bernstein married his fellow poet and visual artist, Susan Bee, with whom he has repeatedly collaborated. In 1978, Bernstein's third book of poetry Shade was published by Sun & Moon Press, and in 1979 his Poetic Justice and Sense of Responsibility were published by Pod Books and Tuumba Press respectively.

From 1979 until 1986, when Bernstein had his first visiting lectureship in the University of Auckland, he published eight books of poetry and one of critical theory: Legend, with Bruce Andrews, Steve McCaffery, Ron Silliman and Ray DiPalma, (Segue Press, 1980), Controlling Interests (Roof, 1980), Disfruits (Poets & Poets Press, 1981), The Occurrence of Tune, Photographs by Susan Bee, (Segue Press, 1981), Stigma (Station Hill Press, 1981), Islets / Irritations (Jordan Davis Press, 1983), Resistance (Awede Press, 1983), Amblyopia (Poets & Poets Press, 1985), and his collection of essays Content's Dream (Sun & Moon Press, 1986). During this period Bernstein edited an anthology of Language poetry entitled: 'The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Sampler, a especial issue of the Paris Review, no. 86, 1982, and an anthology of the Language poet's theoretical writings entitled: The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book, with Bruce Andrews, (Southern Illinois University Press, 1984) based on the first three volumes of the magazine L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E which he had edited with Bruce Andrews from 1978 to 1981. He has also edited the fourth volume of that magazine under the same title as a special issue of the Canadian poetics journal Open Letter, Vol. 5, no. 1 (Toronto: 1982). During this period,

¹ These biographical notes are based upon, The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, Alex Preminger, and T.V.F. Brogan, (eds.), (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), Contemporary Poets, Sixth Edition, Thomas Riggs (ed.), (New York and London: St. James Press, 1996), and the poets' own web-page biographies: Bernstein: <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epe/authors/bernstein/> Hejinian: <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epe/authors/hejinian>

Bernstein was awarded three fellowships; The National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship 1980, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship (1985), and the University of Auckland Foundation Fellowship (1986).

In 1987, Bernstein occupied a Visiting Lecturer's post at the University of California, San Diego and produced two more books of poetry and a book length essay. These are, respectively The Sophist (Sun & Moon Press), Veil (Xexoxial Editions) and The Artifice of Absorption (Paper Air Press). In 1988, he occupied a Visiting Professor's post at the City University of New York, a faculty member and a series co-ordinator at the Wolfson Centre for National Affairs, New School for Social Research, New York. He has also published his poetry book Four Poems (Chax Press). From 1989 to 1990 Bernstein occupied a Lecturer's position in the Creative Writing Programme at Princeton University, New Jersey. Since 1989, he has been the David Gray Professor of Poetry and Letters and Professor of English and Comparative Literature in the Poetics Programme in the State University of New York, at Buffalo. From 1989 to the present, Bernstein produced sixteen books altogether; twelve books of poetry, two books of theory and two edited collections of essays. The poetry books are The Nude Formalism, with Susan Bee, (Sun & Moon Press) and Sense of Responsibility (Paradigm Press), both in 1989, The Lives of the Toll Talkers (Awede Press) and The Absent Father in Dumbo (Zasterle Press), both in 1990, Fool's Gold, with Susan Bee, (Chax Press) and Rough Trades (Sun & Moon Press) both in 1991, Dark City (Sun & Moon Press, 1994), The Subject (Meow Press, 1995) and Little Orphan Anagram with Susan Bee, (Granary Books, 1997). The latest by Bernstein are three more poetry books Log Rhythms (Granary Books, 1998) with illustrations by Susan Bee, Republics of Reality: Poems 1975-1995 (Sun & Moon Press, 2000), which collects many of his now out-of-print works of the 1970s and the 1980s such as Shade and Stigma, and With Strings from the University of Chicago Press, 2001.

Bernstein's theoretical writing during this period consists of: A Poetics (Harvard University Press, 1992); a collection of essays including his book-length article 'The Artifice of Absorption', and My Way: Speeches and Poems (University of Chicago Press, 1999); a selection of essays interviews and poems. His two edited books are The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy (Roof, 1990), and Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word (Oxford University Press, 1998). In 1990, and again in 1995, Bernstein was awarded the New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship, and in 1999 he was awarded The Roy Harvard Pearce / Archive for New Poetry Prize of the University of California, San Diego; for lifetime contribution to poetry and scholarship.

2. Lyn Hejinian



Lyn Hejinian was born in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1941, and currently lives in Berkeley. An editor of Tuumba Press from 1976 to 1983, and a co-editor with Barrett Watten of the Poetics Journal since 1981, she started her poetic career with the publication of A Thought Is the Bride of What Thinking (Tuumba Press, 1976). From 1977 to 1987, Hejinian produced six more book-length poems: A Mask of Motion (Burning Deck, 1977), Writing is an Aid to Memory (The Figures Press, 1978), Gesualdo (Tuumba Perss, 1978), Redo (Salt-Works Press, 1984), The Guard (Tuumba Press, 1984), and My Life in two versions (1980) (1987), (Sun & Moon Press).

Hejinian's extensive knowledge of the Russian language led to her translation of a number of works by the contemporary Russian poet Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, for which she received a translation fellowship from the National Endowments for Arts. Her works' own translations to Russian have, in turn, gained an independent literature award by the Soviet literary organization 'Poetics Function' in 1989. At the same time, she has also received a writing fellowship from The California Arts Council and a grant from the American Poetry Fund.

From 1987 to the present, Hejinian has produced eight more book-length poems and a book of theoretical essays: Individuals (Chax Press, 1988), The Cell (Sun and Moon Press, 1990), The Hunt (Zasterle Press, 1991), Oxota: A Short Russian Story (The Figures, 1991), Leningrad: American Writers in the Soviet Union, with Ron Silliman, Barrett Watten, Michael Davidson, (Mercury House, 1991), The Cold of Poetry (Sun and Moon Press, 1994), which collects many of her now out-of-print poetry volumes such as Gesualdo (1978) The Guard (1984) and Redo (1984), Guide, Grammar, Watch, and The Thirty Nights (Folio (Salt), 1996) and Happily (The Post-Apollo Press, 2000). Her latest theoretical book The Language of Inquiry (University of California Press, 2000) collects most of her previous essays supplemented by current commentary on them.

Appendix II:
Main Publications About The Language Poets

1. *Books:*

- George Hartley, Textual Politics and the Language Poets (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).
- Linda Reinfeld, Language Poetry. Writing as Rescue (Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).
- Hank Lazer, Opposing Poetries: Volumes One and Two (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1996).
- Geoff Ward, Language Poetry and the American Avant-Garde (London: The British Association for American Studies, 1993).
- Megan Simpson, Poetic Epistemologies: Gender and Knowing in Women's Language-Orientated Writing (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000).
- Eleana Kim, 'Language Poetry: Dissident Practices and the Makings of a Movement', book-size article, read me, no. 4 (Spring / Summer, 2001), Internet journal: <http://home.jps.net/~nada/language1.htm>

2. *Book-Sections:*

- Marjorie Perloff, 'The Word As Such: L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Poetry in the Eighties' in her The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1985).
- Marjorie Perloff, 'John Cage's Dublin, Lyn Hejinian's Leningrad: Poetic Cities as Cybercities' in Classical, Renaissance, and Postmodern Acts of Imagination: Essays Commemorating O. B. Hardison, Jr. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996).
- Michael Davidson, 'Approaching the Fin De Siècle' in his The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid Century (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- Stephen Fredman, 'The Crisis at Present: Talk Poems and the New Poet's Prose' in his Poet's Prose: The Crisis in American Verse (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
- Christopher Beach 'Conclusion: Reappropriation and Resistance, Charles Bernstein, Language Poetry, and Poetic Tradition' in his ABC of Influence: Ezra Pound and the Re-Making of American Poetic Traditions (Berkeley & Oxford: University of California Press, 1992).
- Walter Kalaidjian, 'L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Writing and the Historical Avant-Gardes' in his American Culture Between the Wars (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
- Jeffery T. Nealon, 'Politics, Poetics, and Institutions: "Language" Poetry' in his Double Reading: Postmodernism After Deconstruction (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1993).

- Vernon Shetley, 'The Return of the Repossessed: Language Poetry and New Formalism' in his After the Death of Poetry: Poet and Audience in Contemporary America (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1993).
- Alan Golding, 'Provisionally Complicit Resistance' in his From Outlaw to Classic: Canons in American Poetry (Wisconsin & London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).
- John Shoptow, 'Measure and Polyphony in Ashbery and Bernstein' in The Tribe of John Ashbery and Contemporary Poetry, Susan M. Schultz (ed.), (Tuscaloosa & London: The University of Alabama Press, 1995).
- Antoine Cazé, 'Form as Freedom in the Poetry of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Group' in Freedom and Form: Essays in Contemporary American Poetry, Esther Giger and Agnieszka Salska (eds.), (Łódź, Poland: University of Łódź Press, 1998).
- Charles Altieri, 'Lyn Hejinian and the Possibilities of Postmodernism in Poetry' in Women Poets of the Americas: Toward a Pan-American Gathering, Jacqueline Vaught Brogan & Cordelia Chavez Candelaria (eds.), (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).
- Charles Altieri, 'The Transformation of Objectivism: An Afterward' in The Objectivist Nexus: Essays in Cultural Poetics, Rachel Blau DuPlessis & Peter Quartermain (eds.), (Tuscaloosa & London: The University of Alabama Press, 1999).
- Geoff Ward, 'Before and After Language: The New American Poetry' in Poetry and the Sense of Panic, Lionel Kelly (ed.), (Amsterdam & Atlanta: Costerus New Series, Rodopi Press, 2000).

3. *Special Issue Journals:*

- Ron Silliman (ed. & intro.), 'Realism: An Anthology of Language Writing', Ironwood 20, no. 2 (Fall, 1982).
- Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein (eds. & intro.), 'L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Issue', Open Letter, no. 1 (Winter, 1982).
- Charles Bernstein (ed. & intro.), 'Language Sampler', The Paris Review, no. 86 (Winter, 1982).
- Tom Beckett (ed.), 'Charles Bernstein's Issue', The Difficulties, no.1 (Fall, 1982).
- Tom Beckett (ed.), 'Ron Silliman's Issue', The Difficulties, no. 2 (1985).
- Jerome McGann (ed. & intro.), 'Postmodern Poetries', Verse, no. 7 (Spring, 1990).
- Andrew Lawson and Anthony Mellors (eds. & intro.), Untitled, Fragment, no. 2 (Autumn, 1990).
- Peter Gizzi (ed. & intro.), 'Writing from the New Coast', O.blek, no. 12 (Spring / Fall, 1993).

- Rod Smith (ed. & intro.), 'Barrett Watten's Issue', Arial, no. 8 (1995).

4. Articles

- Steve Abbot, 'Language Poets: An Introduction', Poetry Flash, no. 74 (May, 1979).
- Steve Abbott, 'Review of Hejinian's *Writing Is an Aid to Memory* (1987)', American Book Review, Vol. 4, no. 2 (January / February, 1982).
- Charles Altieri, 'Without Consequence Is No Politics: A Response to Jerome McGann' in Politics & Poetic Value, Robert Von Hallberg (ed.), (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), also in Critical Inquiry, Vol.13, no. 3 (Spring, 1987).
- Rae Armantrout, 'The Guard by Lyn Hejinian', How(ever), Vol. 2, no. 2 (February, 1985), Internet version: http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/however/print_archive/alerts0285.html
- Lee Bartlett, 'What Is Language poetry', Critical Inquiry, Vol. 12, no. 4 (Summer, 1986).
- Nina Baym (ed. & intro.), The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Vol. 2 (New York & London: Norton Company, 1998), Fifth Edition.
- Christopher Beach, 'Poetic Positioning: Stephen Dobyns and Lyn Hejinian in Cultural Context', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 38, no. 1 (Spring, 1997).
- Joe Brennan, 'A=r=t M=e=a=n=s', Flashpoint, Web Issue no. 1 (Spring, 1991): <http://www.flashpointmag.com/index1.htm>
- Brian McHale, 'Creative Misinterpretations', American Book Review, Vol. 15, no. 1 (April / May, 1993).
- David Bromwich, 'Comment: Without Admonition' in Politics and Poetic Value, Robert Von Hallberg (ed.), (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), also published in Critical Inquiry, Vol. 13, no. 3 (Spring, 1987).
- Hilary Clark, 'The Mnemonics of Autobiography' Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly, Vol. 14, no. 4 (Fall, 1991).
- Michael Davidson, ' "Skewed by Design": From Act to Speech Act in Language-Writing', Fragment, Issue 2 (Autumn, 1990).
- Rachel Blau DuPlessis, 'On the Davidson / Weinberger Exchange', Sulfur, no. 22 (Spring, 1988).
- Craig Douglas Dworkin, 'Penelope Reworking the Twill: Patchwork, Writing, and Lyn Hejinian's 'My Life'', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 36, no. 1 (Spring, 1995).
- Ken Edwards, 'Language: The Remake', Fragment, no. 2 (Autumn, 1990).

- Logan Esdal, 'This Poetry Which Is Not One', LAGNIAPPE, Vol. 2, no. 2 (Spring / Summer, 2000).
Internet journal: <http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~foust/lagniappe.html>
- Clayton Eshleman 'Comment on the Davidson / Weinberger Exchange', Sulfur, no. 22 (Spring, 1988).
- Kornelia Freitag, "*A pause, a rose, something on paper*": Autobiography as Language Writing In Lyn Hejinian's *My Life*', Amerikastudien, American Studies, Vol. 43, no. 2 (1998).
- Benjamin Friedlander, 'Poetics, Polemic, and the Question of Intelligibility', Postmodern Culture: An Electronic Journal of Interdisciplinary Criticism, Vol. 9, no. 1 (September, 1998).
- Albert Gelpi, 'The Genealogy of Postmodernism: Contemporary American Poetry', The Southern Review, Vol.26, no. 3 (Summer, 1990).
- Roger Gilbert, 'Textured Information: Politics, Pleasure and Poetry in the Eighties', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 33, no. 3 (Summer, 1992).
- Michael Greer, 'Ideology and Theory in Recent Experimental Writing or, The Naming of "Language Poetry"', Boundary 2, Vol. 16, no. 2 / 3 (1989).
- Brian Henry, 'Review of Bernstein's My Way' LAGNIAPPE, Vol. 1, no. 3 (Summer, 1999), Internet journal: <http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~foust/lagniappe.html>
- Scott Hightower, 'Review of Bernstein's My Way', Library Journal, Vol. 124, no. 2 (February, 1999).
- Laura Hinton, 'Centering Margins: The Language Poets Reconsidered (as Women)', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 41, no. 1 (Spring, 2000).
- Paul Hoover (ed. & intro.), Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994).
- David Jarraway, "'My Life' Through the Eighties: The Exemplary L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E of Lyn Hejinian", Contemporary Literature, Vol. 33, no. 2 (Summer, 1992).
- David Kirby, 'The Poetry Scene Today', The Writer, Vol. 107, no. 3 (March, 1994).
- Joel Lewis, 'Ink Mathematics: An Introduction to Language Poetry', Poets & Writers, Vol. 18, no. 5 (September / October, 1990).
- Pierre Joris, 'Review of Bernstein's Rough Trades', American Book Review, (February / March 1993),
Internet version: <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epe/authors/bernstein/reviews/abr-joris.html>
- Jerzy Kutnik, 'Postmodern Language-Centred Writing and the Question of Ideology: A Polish Perspective', Journal of American Studies of Turkey, no. 4 (Fall, 1996).

- William Lavender, 'Disappearance of Theory, Appearance of Praxis: Ron Silliman, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, and the Essay', Poetics Today, Vol. 17, no. 2 (Summer, 1996).
- Andrew Lawson, 'The Short Revolution? Reassessing Language Writing', Fragmente, no. 2 (Autumn, 1990).
- Mike Kelleher, 'Charles Bernstein in the 20th Century: A Brief Revue of Poetic Values', The Transcendental Friend, no. 11 (September, 1999), Internet Journal: <http://www.morningred.com/friend/1999/09/pages/review.html>
- Jackson Mac Low, 'Language-Centered', in the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, Vol. 4, Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews (eds. & intro.), Open Letter, fifth series, no. 1 (Winter, 1982).
- Paul Mann, 'Review Of Leningrad', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 35, no. 1 (Spring, 1994).
- Pual Mann, 'Review of *The Politics of Poetic Form*' (Charles Bernstein, ed. 1990), Contemporary Literature, Vol. 35, no. 1 (Spring, 1994).
- Stephen-Paul Martin, 'Reading in the Words', American Book Review, Vol. 9, no. 4 (September / October, 1987).
- Stephen-Paul Martin, 'Paradigm Lost: Ron Silliman 's Paradise and the archaeology of Language', Sagetrieb, Vol. 8, no. 1 / 2 (Fall, 1989).
- Jerome McGann, 'Contemporary Poetry, Alternate Route', Critical Inquiry, Vol. 13, no. 3 (Spring, 1987).
- Jerome McGann, 'Response to Charles Altieri' in Politics & Poetic Value, Robert Von Hallberg (ed.), (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
- Rod Mengham, 'Untitled Review in Textual Practice, Vol. 3, no. 1 (Spring, 1989).
- Douglas Messerli (ed. & intro.), "Language" Poetries: An Anthology, (New York: New Directions, 1987).
- Patricia Monaghan, 'My Way: Speeches and Poems, A Review', Booklist, Vol. 95, no. 8 (December 15th, 1998).
- David Kellog, 'Microreviews', Boston Review, (April / May, 2001), Internet version: <http://bostonreview.mit.edu/BR26.2/contents.html>
- Patricia Monaghan, 'Review of Dark City', Booklist, Vol. 90, no. 18 (May 15th, 1994).
- Tenney Nathanson, 'Collage and Pulverization in Contemporary American Poetry: Charles Bernstein's Controlling Interests', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 33, no. 2 (Summer, 1992).

- Paul Naylor, '(Mis) Characterizing Charlie: Language and The Self in the Poetry and Poetics of Charles Bernstein', Sagetrieb, Vol. 14, no. 3 (Winter, 1995).
- Andrew Osborn, 'Review of My Way', Chicago Review, (Summer / Fall, 1999).
- John Palattella, 'Review of A Poetics', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 35, no. 1 (Spring, 1994).
- John Palattella, 'Microreviews', Boston Review, (April / May, 2001), Internet version <http://bostonreview.mit.edu/BR26.2/contents.html>
- Ethan Paquin, 'Microreviews', Boston Review, (April / May, 2001), Internet version: <http://bostonreview.mit.edu/BR26.2/contents.html>
- Marjorie Perloff, 'How Russian Is It: Lyn Hejinian's Oxota', Parnassus: Long Poem Issue, no. 17 (Spring, 1993).
- Marjorie Perloff, 'Language Poetry and the Lyric Subject: Ron Silliman's Albany, Susan Howe's Buffalo', Critical Inquiry, Vol. 25, no. 3 (Spring, 1999).
- Marjorie Perloff, 'After Language Poetry: Innovation and Its Theoretical Discontents' (1999), Internet version: http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/perloff/after_langpo.html
- Marjorie Perloff, 'Happy World: What Lyn Hejinian's Poetry Tells Us About Chance, Fortune, and Pleasure', Boston Review, Vol. 25 (February / March, 2000), Internet version: <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/perloff/articles/hejinian.html>
- Perloff, Marjorie, 'John Cage's Dublin, Lyn Hejinian's Leningrad: Poetic Cities as Cybercities' in Classical, Renaissance, and Postmodern Acts of Imagination; Essays Commemorating O. B. Hardison, Jr. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996).
- R. D. Pohl, 'Review of Republics of Reality', The Buffalo News, May 7th, 2000.
- Entry on Language poetry in The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, Alex Preminger, & T.V.F. Brogan (eds.), (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
- Peter Quartermain, 'Syllable as Music: Lyn Hejinian's *Writing Is An Aid to Memory*', Sagetrieb, Vol. 11, no. 3 (Winter, 1992).
- Paul Quinn, 'Rattling the Chains of Free Verse', Times Literary Supplement, Friday April 30th, 1999.
- Jed Rasula, 'The Politics of, the Politics in', Politics and Poetic Value, Robert Von Hallberg (ed.), (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).
- Entry on Language poetry in Contemporary Poets, Thomas Riggs (ed.), (New York and London: St. James Press, 1996), Sixth Edition.

- Lisa Samuels, 'Eight Justifications for Canonizing Lyn Hejinian's *My Life*', Modern Language Studies, Vol. 27, no. 2 (1997).
- Susan M. Schultz, 'Postmodern Promos', Internet version: http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/schultz/a_poetics.html
- Susan M. Schultz, 'Of Time and Charles Bernstein's Lines: A Poetics of Fashion Statements', Jacket, no. 14 (July, 2001), Internet journal: <http://jacketmagazine.com/14/schultz-bernstein.html>
- James Shivers, 'Review of Close Listening', Washington Review On Line, Vol. 24, no. 4 (December / January, 1998/99). <http://washingtonreview.com/xxxiv4:htm>
- Alan Soldofsky, 'Language and Narcissism', Poetry Flash, no. 74 (May, 1979).
- Juliana Spahr, 'Resignifying Autobiography: Lyn Hejinian's *My life*', American Literature, Vol. 68, no. 1 (March, 1996).
- Brian Kim Stefans, 'Lyn Hejinian ' *Happily* ', LAGNIAPPE, Vol. 2, no. 1 (Fall, 1999), Internet journal: <http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~foust/lagniappe.html>
- Daniel Tiffany, 'The Rhetoric of Materiality', Sulfur, no. 22 (Spring, 1988).
- Geoffrey Treacle, 'Language Review', Chicago Review, (Summer / Fall, 1999).
- Keith Tuma, 'Contemporary American Poetry and the Pseudo Avant-Garde', Chicago Review, Vol. 36, no. 3 / 4 (Summer / Fall, 1998).
- Geoff Ward, 'My Way: Speeches and Poems', A Review', Boston Review, (October / November, 1999), Internet version: <http://bostonreview.mit.edu/BR24.5/ward.html>
- Eliot Weinberger, 'A Note On Montemora, America & The World', in Sulfur, no. 20 (Fall, 1987), also in his Written Reaction: Poetics, Politics, Polemics (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1996).
- Nigel Wheale (ed. & intro), The Postmodern Arts: An Introductory Reader (New York & London: Routledge, 1995).
- Tim Wood, 'Charles Bernstein: Politics, Poetics, and Laughter Against Tears; An Interview', ArtsDFW.com.net.org, (April, 2000), Internet journal: http://www.artsdfw.com/article.phtml?id_serial=343
- Timothy Yu, 'Form and Identity in Language Poetry and Asian American Poetry', Contemporary Literature, Vol. 41, no. 3 (Fall, 2000).
- Ann Vickery, 'Leaving Lines of Gender: A Feminist Genealogy of Language Writing', HOW 2, Vol. 1, no. 4 (September, 2000), Internet journal: http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/however/v1_4_2000/current/readings/vickery.html